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Kenya Birds

Volume 2, Number 2 January 1994

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A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and the Kenya Section of BirdLife International.

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Editorial

Sorry: we are late. Production of *Kenya Birds* had to be pushed back a month this time, due to the all-too-frequent 'circumstances beyond our control'. This issue contains news and records up to the end of January 1994.

Lots of material has come in and this is a bulky issue: thanks to all those who have sent us records and notes. Offers to write a few more substantial articles would be welcome too, and we repeat our plea for good pen-and-ink illustrations.

BirdLife Kenya has decided to continue to subsidise *Kenya Birds* as part of its education and awareness campaign, so we are happy to say that (unlike almost everything else) our subscription rates will remain the same in 1994 as last year. For those who have not already paid, subs for the next volume are now due.

Production of this issue has also been helped by the Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Programme (KIFCON), which made a generous contribution. We had hoped to highlight some of KIFCON's ground-breaking conservation work in Kakamega, but sadly KIFCON is now closing down later this year. The Programme's leadership in forest conservation will be sorely missed.

Subscription Rates (1 year)

	EANHS members	Non–members
Kenya	KSh 120/–	KSh 200/–
Elsewhere (air mail)	UK £6.00	UK £7.50

(Subscribers outside Kenya may pay in any convertible currency.)
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Front cover illustration: Black-faced Rufous Warbler *Bathmocercus cerviniventris* from a vignette by Martin Woodcock. Typesetting and layout: National Museums of Kenya. Printed in Kenya by Oaklin Printers, P O Box 47007, Nairobi.

News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

Back to Turkana

From 6-21 July 1993 research scientists Edward Waiyaki and Oliver Nasirwa joined Italian colleagues Mauro Fasola and Nicola Saini in a mid-year survey of waterbirds on the south-eastern shores of Lake Turkana. Observations on feeding behaviour and habitat choice were made to complement earlier studies in January and February 1992: in July far fewer migrant waterbirds are present, and some changes in the behaviour of resident birds might have been expected. The team rounded off their trip with an investigation of cooperative pelican feeding behaviour on Lake Nakuru.

Soggy Sokoke

The forest team (Leon Bennun, Edward Waiyaki, Joseph Oyugi, Patrick Gichuki and KWS intern Richard Tomno) spent much of July and August in Arabuko-Sokoke forest collecting baseline data for monitoring as part of the KIFCON project. Sites were chosen to cover two different habitats (the 'mixed forest' and *Brachystegia*) and two usage zones. Mist-netting produced a good variety of birds, including a number of the threatened and endemic species — some with rings on already from John Fanshawe's earlier work in the forest. Several bird parties, complete with orioles, helmet shrikes and Clarke's Weavers, proved among the most exciting captures. The only problem was the weather, with heavy rain almost every morning, usually in the middle of mist-netting. At Gede Ruins, the team went in pursuit of the elusive Spotted Ground Thrush for another season of monitoring work on this enigmatic migratory species.

Around and about the Kwale kayas

After completing the Sokoke work, the forest team proceeded down to Ukunda in Kwale and the headquarters of the Coast Forest Conservation Unit (CFCU). A busy three days was spent looking around kayas and forest reserves in the district in advance of a more intensive survey planned for April–August 1994. This brief reconnaissance brought home both the fascinating variety of these coastal forests and the peril they are in. A number of kayas are still well protected by their traditional caretakers, with the encouragement of the CFCU, but others are under

great threat. Because of their cultural and biological importance, the majority are now protected as national monuments under the National Museums of Kenya. However, this has not prevented several beachfront kayas being divided up and 'allocated' to influential individuals. Charcoaling and pole-cutting have also taken their toll. Signs of destructive illegal logging (on top of the licensed extraction of timber) were evident in the forest reserves, too, even in a 'strict' nature reserve such as Mrima Hill. These coastal forests are a priceless resource, and the CFCU needs support in its attempt to promote conservation for the benefit of local communities. The ornithology team thanks the members of the Unit for their hospitality and help at Ukunda, and wishes them every success in their difficult task.

Hinde's Babbler study completed in Kianyaga

From July to December 1993, Moi University MSc student Peter Njoroge and Kenya Polytechnic student David Mutinda carried out field research on the threatened Hinde's Babbler from a base in Kianyaga, Kirinyaga District. The study is supported by BirdLife Kenya, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Kenya Wildlife Service. Njoroge's work focused on mapping home ranges, studying behaviour and habitat use, and monitoring breeding; Mutinda assisted, and carried out his own parallel study on a possible competitor species, the Northern Pied Babbler (see *Kenya Birds* 1(2)). The attitudes of local people to the birds and to land use were also assessed. Department staff Leon Bennun, Edward Waiyaki and Joseph Oyugi visited the study site in late August to capture and colour-band individual babblers. The capture efforts met with mixed success: some groups proved too crafty for their pursuers and led them a merry dance up and down the steep Kianyaga valleys. In the end 15 individuals, from five groups, were ringed. Blood samples and photographs were taken for each bird, and recordings of calls were made.

Preliminary results show that two major threats to the Hinde's Babblers are hunting by local people (who apparently regard this species as a great delicacy) and the disappearance of suitable habitat. The babblers live near the bottom of steep river valleys, and while they forage quite happily in maize fields or coffee plantations they need some dense scrub (such as *Lantana* thickets) to shelter and nest in. These thickets occur on fallow land, which is increasingly scarce in this intensively farmed and heavily populated area. Probably for this reason, only one of the five nest attempts observed was successful, the rest falling victim to predators or human disturbance.

The much commoner Northern Pied Babblers apparently keep more to the ridge-tops and do not overlap greatly with the Hinde's. However, when groups of

the two species meet they often fight — with Hinde's emerging the winner, suggesting that at least in this respect it is competitively superior to its relative. Njoroge and Mutinda are still analysing their data, and a fuller account will appear in the next *Kenya Birds*.

Meanwhile, a new Hinde's Babbler site has been found by Department staff Patrick Gichuki and Kuria Ndung'u at Wanjee Camp in Mukurweini, some way outside the previously known range. Surveys of this and several other localities will be made over the next few months to gain a better picture of this species' status.

Gamebirds and Ostriches

Like other forms of 'wildlife utilisation', gamebird hunting is a potentially valuable conservation mechanism. Although gamebird hunting does go on in many parts of Kenya, there is very little information on the demography of the birds themselves, the effect that hunting has, and how local communities can best manage their environment for gamebirds. Since November 1993, Wildlife Management graduate Alfred Simiyu has been based in the Department, working on a project to develop gamebird habitat and hunting guidelines for group ranches in Kajiado District. The project is supervised by Heather Eves of the New Mexico State University, who over the last year has been developing and testing techniques for monitoring populations of Yellow-necked Spurfowl, an important gamebird species. Simiyu's field work is based at Imbirikani Ranch in southern Kajiado; it involves both biology and economics, in the form of a cost-benefit analysis of hunting operations.

Meanwhile, Florence Mwikali, a Kenya Polytechnic student, has been attached to the Department since September 1993 working on a study of Ostriches at Elangata Wuas in Kajiado. This group ranch has an unusual Ostrich farming project, where young birds are raised alongside cattle in a manyatta-based system. Florence has been monitoring eggs in the nests of wild birds and checking on the growth of young captive Ostriches.

Bird ringing at Ngulia

On 10 December 1993, Ornithology Department staff members Joseph Oyugi, Patrick Gichuki and Kuria Ndung'u left for a five-day bird ringing trip to Ngulia Lodge in Tsavo West. We joined other ringers from different countries and backgrounds to form a sixteen-strong team.

Ngulia is a famous ringing station for Palaearctic migrants. From August to October, millions of birds leave their breeding grounds in Europe and Asia for winter quarters far to the South. Some species migrate to India and the Far East,

others fly to Africa. Most of these migrants fly at night using celestial aids to navigate. During November, December and January, Ngulia experiences rain and mist at night. When the southward-bound migratory birds encounter these adverse conditions, they lose altitude and seek the ground. Those near enough to see the very bright lights of the lodge are attracted and settle in the trees nearby; some even come into the lodge itself. Ornithologists take advantage of this and ring large numbers of birds *en route*.

Bird activity was high when the mist was down. Thousands of birds flew into the nets, and others were flushed out of the bushes by use of sticks. More than 7,000 birds were ringed in five days, mostly Sylviidae (warblers, e.g. the Great Reed Warbler, Basra Reed Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Upcher's Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler, River Warbler, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat and Barred Warbler) and several Turdidae (thrushes such as Irania, Sprosser and Nightingale). A few European Rollers and Red-tailed Shrikes and one European Nightjar were also ringed.

Mist-netting continued into the day with other migrants flying into the net, including European Cuckoo, European Swallow, Spotted Flycatcher, Isabelline Wheatear and Pied Wheatear.

Other local birds of interest ringed were Black and White Cuckoo and Donaldson-Smith's, Plain and Dusky Nightjars. — *Joseph Oyugi, Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi.*

First, catch your owl...

Almost by definition, owl studies are fraught with practical difficulties. Munir Virani's research on the endangered Sokoke Scops Owl (part of the Department's joint raptor conservation project with the Peregrine Fund, USA) has proved no exception. Munir, a Nairobi University graduate who is now working for his MSc at Leicester University, planned to radio-tag several pairs of owls in order to gather information on their home range size, movements and roost sites. Capturing them proved the initial problem, since the owls resisted all blandishments offered by raptor expert Simon Thomsett in the form of cunningly baited traps. Finally, after much trial, error and effort, mist-nets hauled into the treetops brought some success. Then it proved impossible to keep the radio transmitters on the owls — over and over the birds simply bit them off. The solution this time was a tiny back-pack secured gently with rubber bands around the base of the wings, a mechanism that proved both effective and safe. After tiring nights spent locating and following the birds in the dense *Cynometra* forest, a network of narrow trails in this almost impenetrable habitat then had to be extended day by tedious day so that more home ranges could be covered.

The effort was worthwhile: good data were obtained on three tagged pairs of owls, and this has revealed many new facts about their behaviour. Meanwhile, Heather Tarpley, an intern on the project, has collected data on the distribution of Barred Owlets in the forest and followed a radio-tagged African Wood Owl. The results are presently being analysed by Munir and Heather and a fuller account will appear in the next issue.

Lesser Flamingos hit by mystery disease

Concentrations of the beautiful Lesser Flamingo form one of the greatest attractions of Kenya's Rift Valley lakes. However, these birds were hit by a strange and fatal disease a few months ago.

The outbreak began at Lake Bogoria in early September 1993. At first only a few flamingos died, but the mortality rate rapidly climbed. By the end of the month around 25,000 birds were estimated to have died. This was the first ever reported mass death of birds in the lake and, surprisingly, none of the other bird species appeared to be affected. A few Lesser Flamingos were also reported to be dying at Nakuru, but it seems likely that these had come from Bogoria.

Help was sought from scientists at the Kenya Wildlife Service and the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya to find out what was happening. A thorough investigation was done on 23–24 September 1993, when several post-mortems were performed and swabs and samples taken for laboratory analysis. General observations on the numbers and behaviour of the flamingos were also made. After this the dead birds were burnt with the hope of slowing down the spread of the disease or stopping it altogether.

During our visit at least one out of five birds was ill. Sick flamingos were inactive and alone along the shorelines. Some were noticed limping and others standing on one leg. In flight others had their necks and one leg hanging rather than outstretched as usual.

Dr Richard Kock of the Kenya Wildlife Service confirmed through laboratory tests performed in Nairobi that the death was due to septicaemia caused by a bacterial infection. The test isolated two bacteria: *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, a common water-borne organism, and *Escherichia coli*, a normal resident of the gut in many bird species.

This suggests some environmental stress increasing the birds susceptibility to infection. (*Pseudomonas aeruginosa* is well known medically as a cause of dangerous septicaemia in human patients with impaired resistance.) Weather conditions (high temperature and lack of rainfall), consequent changes in water quality and unusually crowded conditions at favoured feeding sites may all possibly be factors. An associated algal bloom seemed likely to be related to the morbidity.

The Lesser Flamingo feeds mainly on a cyanophyte, *Spirulina platensis*, suspended in the top inch or so of the water. This may explain why other bird species were not affected as they feed on different water layers. The *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* might well have benefited from the same condition that led to the algal bloom, and were then able to overwhelm the defensive mechanism of the birds.

The Lesser Flamingo is the world's most numerous flamingo, with a total population estimated at five to six million. At least two million and possibly four and half million Lesser Flamingos occur in Africa. The species ranges widely in Africa south of the Sahara, the Persian Gulf and north-west India, and is nomadic within the range. Considering their distribution and the total population, the number dead is relatively a very small percentage.

The whole problem seems to be natural and weather changes including more rainfall with lower temperatures may help control the disease. — *Joseph Oyugi, Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi.*

[The disease did indeed die down at Bogoria after some rain fell in November, but in late December 1993 sick and dying flamingos began to reappear. During the Bogoria waterbird count in early January 1994, sick birds were noted but in much smaller overall numbers than in September the previous year. — *Eds.*]

Woodpeckers falsely accused

Department staff were called in last year to solve a 'whodunit'. Entomologists from the International Institute of Biological Control, working on the biological control of Large Grain Borer *Prostephanus trucantus* at Kiboko, Makweni District, had noticed that many trunks and branches of trees near their site had been ring-barked and were dying. The dying wood provided a good home for the Large Grain Borer, making control more difficult.

The entomologists felt convinced that a woodpecker was responsible for the ring-barking. No such behaviour had ever been reported for woodpeckers before, but Joseph Oyugi and Kuria Ndung'u went down in November to have a look. Sure enough, there were plenty of trees with ring-barked limbs — mainly *Commiphora riparia*. Only one woodpecker species, the Nubian, was seen, and it was not engaged in ring-barking. The ring-barked sections were at various heights on the trees, some very near the ground, and had been chewed all round, not pecked; samples were taken back to Nairobi. It turns out that the woodpeckers have been maligned: another insect, the long-horn beetle *Diastocera reticulata*, is the guilty party. An adult was collected from one section and a larva taken from another is still being monitored. Apparently ring-barking is a well-known behaviour in this insect group. The woodpeckers seen 'attacking' the trees were no doubt just homing in on a tasty meal.

BirdLife Kenya

Raptor rupture

BirdLife Committee member Simon Thomsett has been busy dealing with veterinary crises. First a Madagascar Fish Eagle chick fell out of a nest, and had to be flown to Nairobi for treatment (see *Records and Notes*, below: 'Mad Fish' is now doing well). Then the female of the Crowned Eagle pair at Ololua Forest was reported to have a damaged eye. After much precarious tree-climbing Simon finally caught the bird and whisked it off for specialist attention at the Kikuyu Eye Hospital — top eye surgeon Mark Wood and veterinarian John Richardson having kindly agreed to assist. The eye was examined and a minor operation attempted to free it of a fluid build-up, but there was a very nasty moment when the tranquillised eagle stopped breathing and had to be given mouth-to-beak resuscitation! The bird came round again, much to everyone's relief, but unfortunately there was no easy cure for the eye problem. It seemed that this had resulted from a puncture wound some time back, and apart from a general cleaning-up the eye had to be left much as before. To repair the eye would require a new lens: an artificial one would cost about $10,000, and real Crowned Eagle lens donors are obviously in short supply!

The eagle was released at Ololua shortly afterwards and seems unruffled by its experience; it has since been seen on the nest with the male, and some nest building is going on. Supplementary food is being provided for the pair, since the female is almost certainly unable to hunt as usual.

BirdLife helps Crane Project

BirdLife Kenya has donated KSh 25,000/= to the long-running Kenya Crane and Wetland Project to enable the research station at Saiwa Swamp to be repaired and kept running over the next six months. The station is a valuable resource and crane researchers from Germany and the USA will be based there this year while carrying out their field work. Funding for a new phase of the Crane Project is expected in July 1994.

World Birdwatch '93

From Kapenguria to Kilifi, from Samburu to the Shimba Hills, from Mwea to Maseno, no cisticola or greenbul was safe from the binoculars of Kenya's birdwatchers on the weekend of 9–10 October 1993. More than 276 people in 76 different teams took part, and managed to record a final tally of 797. This is three-quarters of all the bird species ever recorded in Kenya and an achievement of which all the participants can be proud. Thanks to the generosity of sponsors,

more than KSh 300,000/= was raised: a huge boost to BirdLife Kenya and to bird conservation in the country.

These statistics, impressive though they are, do not show the enormous (if often exhausting) fun that everyone had in a weekend of non-stop birding, and the real impact that the Birdwatch made on many people who might never have given birds a second thought before. Judging from people's letters, the event also seems to have woken many birders from near-dormancy and given them fresh enthusiasm. A big thank-you once again to everyone who took part, and to all those who supported the event and helped make it a success.

The frequent question being asked now is... will we have a Birdwatch every year? Given the huge amount of time and effort such an event takes to organise, the answer has to be "no". About every four years may be the right frequency for a major Birdwatch of this type, which will help us to monitor bird distributions in the country as well as raising awareness and some funds. In between, however, it is likely that birding events on a smaller scale will take place to mark the World Birdwatch weekend and keep the spirit of the event alive. Watch this space!

The other question being asked is, of course, did Kenya record the highest national species total in the world. The answer this time is a resounding "YES"! BirdLife International is putting together a final species list and will send us a report in due course. In the meantime, we have received the following interim report from them:

What happened in the rest of the world — an interim report from the BirdLife International Secretariat

"217 organisations in 99 countries took part in World Birdwatch '93. This included 39 organisations from Europe, 88 from North America, 20 from the Caribbean, 21 from Africa and 22 from Asia. As well as birdwatching outings and talks, events included children's drawing in the Seychelles, a conservation display in Sierra Leone and a conservation play in Bahia State, Brazil.

Many organisations used the basic materials provided by BirdLife (including the poster designed by the RSPB). The Latin American Regional BirdLife Office produced a booklet on bird watching and a World Birdwatch '93 baseball cap, which was distributed to organisations in the region. CECIA in Ecuador produced the most attractive poster seen to date, and the Ghana Wildlife Society produced an excellent T-Shirt.

Media coverage in almost all countries was excellent, within national TV and radio coverage and many national and local newspaper articles. *The aim of raising public awareness of birds and the need for their conservation was*

undoubtedly fulfilled. In addition, valuable publicity for both the local organisation and the BirdLife partnership was obtained around the world.

Reports are still pouring in to the BirdLife Secretariat, where the lists of birds seen are being entered onto a database. A World List of birds seen over the weekend will be produced early in 1994.

The total number of species seen so far is 2,094. Extrapolating from this, it is expected that over 3,500 species will have been seen — over a third of the world's total of 9,700 species.

A few examples of what went on around the world...

The highest species total so far goes to Kenya, where a staggering 797 bird species were seen. Organised by the BirdLife International Kenya Section, more than 270 people took part in 76 different World Birdwatch teams at different sites around the country. The highest score for one team was 279 at Lake Elmenteita near Gilgil.

In India, the Green Watcher's Nature Club from Tumkur braved the monsoon and organised an event for local school children and other visitors to the Devarayana Durga State Forest. 485 people took part in birdwatching activities, many for the first time. 128 species were seen, including a new bird for the forest: Maroon-breasted Sunbird.

In Israel, 3,000 people turned out for the Israel Raptor Information Centre's event. Highlights included 5,000 pelicans, 700 Black Stork and 50 Short-toed Eagles.

Fundaçion Habitat in Argentina, a small conservation organisation, organised a birdwatching day for their members and friends. One of their main successes was a lengthy article in a major newspaper *El Litoral*, with over 200,000 readers.

In the Netherlands, 2,000 birdwatchers counted 3 million birds of 250 species. The event was organised by the BirdLife International partner Vogelbescherming, who also organised a rapid information exchange for European participants.

The highlight in Hungary was 60,000 migrating cranes over Hortobagy National Park.

Some quotes from letters sent in by the organisations that took part sum up the event:

"The mass media gave excellent coverage and generated a great deal of publicity, the objective of promoting birdwatching was definitely met." *Kim Keang, The Nature Society (Singapore) Bird Group.*

"There was media publicity across the country and newspapers carried the

message all over... many people were excited with the activities." *Philip K Gitahi, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya.*

"It was a successful and worthwhile effort and we are delighted to have been able to participate." *Molly R Gaskin, The Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust, Trinidad and Tobago.*

"I don't have words to express my feelings on how tremendous the response to this event was, by every one connected to it." *Ameen Ahmed, Green Watchers Nature Club, India.*"

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Some funny things happened during the Birdwatch — we are still hearing stories of triumphs and near-disasters, species that got away and others that stood up to be counted. Unfortunately, rather few participants have written in with their anecdotes. Different teams adopted different strategies: some went all-out for a super-long list, others made extraordinary efforts to locate a particular species. It was strange how often regular daily visitors to particular gardens, or dead-certs for a particular site, were noticeably absent over the weekend — only to reappear as usual on Monday morning. Another frequent frustration was when a sought-after species zipped past, or cleared its throat, when only one member of the team was looking or listening. Most of the birds that no-one saw are rare or unusual: but what happened to some others — all the Purple Gallinules, the Grosbeak Canaries and the Rosy-breasted Longclaws, to name a few?

On the ground, public response to the Birdwatch was generally positive, but unpredictable. Imre Loefler and his team spent the weekend searching for birds in the intense heat around the Shombole Swamp. They saw fifty Grey Crowned Cranes, the same number of Black Herons, and a large number of Kori Bustard... as well as elephant tracks. At one stage Imre's vehicle nearly became mired in some particularly glutinous black mud and they stopped at the first fairly liquid pool to wash some of it off. A Maasai *moran* approached Imre and drew him aside, advising him in a concerned manner, "You know, there are much easier *panya* routes from Tanzania than the one you have chosen."

In Nairobi, telephone contact between Jean Hartley, Fleur Ng'weno and Jeremy Cumberledge (all 'watching' in Nairobi) went on far into Saturday night, as Jean strove to compile a fax for the BBC's 'Really Wild Show'. The fax evidently reached the right place, as a friend of Fleur's telephoned from America on Sunday morning to say that she'd heard Fleur's Saturday score on the BBC World Service. Jean's resident Lemon Dove had disappeared, and everyone was

despairing that they might miss this shy and uncommon bird. The day was saved by Cecilia Gichuki and her team who travelled especially to a garden in Langata, and telephoned Fleur to say, "We got the Lemon Dove".

In Kakamega, Joseph Oyugi, George Amutete, Mbarani Chahilu and Leon Bennun were scrambling down a muddy, overgrown forest trail by torchlight in order to catch the dawn chorus in the heart of the forest. An hour later, several dozen species had been ticked off... but no Bristlebill, one of the commonest and noisiest birds in the forest. A few months ago the forest had resounded to their song, but now for some reason they were completely silent. Eventually, as the team was about to head back to the edge there came one brief call — enough to tick off the Bristlebill and move on. Out before dawn and back after dark each day, the team missed two of the most conspicuous birds of the town itself: Hooded Vulture and Marabou Stork, both congregating in the grounds of the Golf Hotel but only recorded the day before and the day after the count!

Meanwhile in the Tana River Delta, Kuria Ndung'u, Jill and Renaldo Retief and Oliver Nasirwa were in search of the Morning Thrush at Kipini. Too bad... the thrush was nowhere to be seen, and the tide would only allow a few minutes' stay. As the others dashed back to the boat, Kuria, behind the rest of the group, clearly heard the thrush: but it could not now be counted! On to Ngomeni Forest, where Pel's Fishing Owl was eventually found, perched on an *Albizia* tree, after an hour of searching. The excitement of seeing the owl made up for the fact that the tide had now gone way out, it was dark, and the boat had to be pushed around a kilometre through the deep squelching mud of the creek to reach the water...

KIFCON to close

Conservationists around the country have been dismayed to hear that the second phase of the Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Programme (KIFCON), which should have begun in June this year, will not after all take place. An official statement said that this was because the British and Kenyan governments had been unable to agree how the project should be implemented. KIFCON was to have funded extensive conservation and development programmes in and around Kakamega and Arabuko-Sokoke Forests, two of the most important sites for birds in Kenya, as well as work to improve indigenous forest conservation nationwide.

EANHS Ornithological Sub-committee

***Scopus* 17(1)**

The most recent issue of *Scopus* contains articles on the Impenetrable, Budongo and Kifu Forests and Kampala, Uganda; Vikindu Forest Reserve, West Kilombero,

the Ukaguru and East Usambara Mts., Tanzania; Ethiopian migrants; the Somali check-list; and commensal species in the Comoros. Five short communications cover a range of species from sunbirds to spoonbills.

Local subscriptions to *Scopus* for 1994 will cost KSh 400/= and should be sent to Don Turner, P O Box 48019, Nairobi.

African Bird Club
The African Bird Club is a new society that will provide a worldwide focus for African ornithology. It is being launched in Britain in close liaison with, and with the support of, many African bird societies — including the OS-C. The club's Chairman is Martin Woodcock, well-known to many local birders as the illustrator of *Birds of Africa*. Members will receive a twice-yearly colour bulletin with news, reviews, site guides and identification articles. For more information, write to the African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girtor Rd., Cambridge CB3 ONA, UK.

Kenya Wetlands Working Group

A million and some flamingos
The mid-year waterbird count at Lake Nakuru was dominated (even more than usual) by Lesser Flamingos, with the long-suffering ground counters recording around 1.4 million birds — the highest total so far in this series of counts. Rather disconcertingly, a telescope count from Lion Hill produced only a little over half this number. Investigations into the best counting method will continue: problems from the top include eye strain and the difficulty of seeing clearly across to the far shore; the main problem on the ground is judging the numbers of birds in the middle of the lake. Apart from flamingos, the Great White Pelicans were also back in force: more than 43,000 were counted, a welcome return of this magnificent species.

January counts
The annual January waterbird counts continued in 1994 with censuses and training at Dandora, Naivasha, Elmenteita, Nakuru and Bogoria; Magadi was also counted. All went well, despite the odd sticky patch and a car-load of disappearing counters. Predictably after the prolonged dry conditions of the last two years, water levels were low everywhere. This was especially evident at Nakuru, where the wide exposed beach proved a muddy nightmare for a number of teams [particularly the heavier members among them — *Ed.*]: the unusual

phenomenon of 'telescope subsidence', where a counter slowly sinks below the level of the eyepiece, was severally reported. The birds were not enjoying the conditions at Nakuru much either, and some teams had just one species — Lesser Flamingo — in their sections. On the other hand, waders and duck were revelling in the big swamp that Naivasha had become, with lake levels too low for boat passage in many parts. Fuller results in the next issue once analysis is complete.

International

Crane and Wetland Workshop

From 8–15 August 1993 about 150 people from 24 African nations, who study and help protect cranes and their wetland and grassland habitats, met in Maun, Botswana. Other crane specialists from eight nations offered their expertise to organise this, the first ever African Crane and Wetland Training Workshop.

All over the world humans are now degrading grassland and wetlands, and cranes have become the world's most endangered bird family. The Maun meeting, organised by the International Crane Foundation, was intended to bring together crane workers to learn from each others' experiences and develop strategies for conservation and research (including national Crane and Wetland Action Plans). The thirteen Kenyan participants included two from the Department of Ornithology: support for the Kenyan delegation was provided by ICF, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the British Council, the US State Department, World Wide Fund for Nature (EA) and the East African Wildlife Society.

Coastal Forests meeting

East Africa's coastal forests are extremely rich in endemic species of plants and animals. They are also very threatened: apart from a few large blocks, they consist of a scattering of tiny fragments along the coastal plain from Mozambique to Somalia. Concern for the fate of these forests was the spur for a workshop in Dar es Salaam from 9–11 August, organised by the University of Dar es Salaam, Frontier Tanzania and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Among the issues discussed was how to define a 'coastal forest' (best done, it was agreed, by an assessment of characteristic fauna and flora communities: rather oddly, this leads to the recognition of coastal forests in land-locked Zimbabwe!) and which coastal forest sites and species needed especially urgent attention. A list of coastal forest birds was produced and used to help classify sites according to conservation importance: in the top bracket are Arabuko-Sokoke, Shimba Hills and the lowland East Usambaras. All these are relatively

large tracts, but it is likely that the many small fragments are collectively also very important: we do not know how birds may move between these remnant patches, or how they may be used on passage by the many migratory forest species. Some of these patches also contain extremely rare plants. The conclusion of many delegates: *all* coastal forests are probably important, and much more attention needs to be given to this very interesting and vanishing habitat.

Flamingos breed at Natron...

Lesser Flamingo breeding was observed again in 1993 at Lake Natron, where an intrepid team from the BBC Natural History Film Unit (Amanda Barrett and Owen Newman) filmed nesting birds in late October and early November. A colony of about 2,000 pairs was seen at Gelai in early October; by the first week of November, according to Amanda, many more birds had joined the colony and were continuing to come in to nest. A full survey of the lake was not done. The colonies were approached by helicopter, which caused much less disturbance than a small aeroplane would have done and allowed cameraman Owen to set up a hide on the soda flats. Nonetheless, filming in this most hostile of environments, perched on a thin soda crust above quaking alkaline mud, sounds to have been hair-raising... and extremely uncomfortable! Amanda and Owen's film, "Mystery of the Flame Bird" is due for release on British television soon, and contains some stunning flamingo images from Bogoria as well as Natron.

...and are discussed at Nakuru

The GEF Regional Biodiversity Project sponsored a regional workshop on wetland biodiversity held at Nakuru from 9–13 November 1994. A whole day of the discussions was devoted to flamingos, and highlighted the many unanswered questions surrounding these most conspicuous yet mysterious of birds. Despite years of study, there are still huge gaps in our understanding of how many there are in East Africa; when, where and why they move; what possible threats they face; and how we can best monitor their population. An encouraging outcome of the meeting was the promise of greater regional coordination in counting flamingos (which appear to move freely up and down the eastern Rift Valley, and probably as far as Namibia and Botswana), in setting up a preliminary aerial survey covering all key sites, and in mitigating possible threats. Chief among these are development plans in both Kenya and Tanzania that may affect the birds' key breeding site, Lake Natron.

Minziro marvels

A new bird for Tanzania, the Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx mechowi*, has been recorded at Minziro by Neil Baker and a team of ornithologists during

a recent field trip. Other exciting finds were Weyn's Weaver and Papyrus Canary (both now confirmed for the Tanzanian list) and Black-chinned Quail-finch. Away from Minziro itself, a huge flock of at least 1,500 Black-tailed Godwits at Singida was one of the highlights of the trip.

Appointments at BirdLife International

BirdLife International have appointed Lincoln Fishpool to coordinate the Important Bird Areas (IBA) project for Africa. A steering committee has been set up consisting of ornithologists from all over the continent, and this met for the first time in Cambridge, UK, in December 1994. There was lively debate on a number of issues — including geographical coverage and the definition of criteria for IBAs. Kenya is slated to be among the first set of countries to carry out the IBA exercise, and funding for this is being sought at present.

Meanwhile, *Kenya Birds* joint Editor John Fanshawe has been appointed BirdLife's Programme Development Manager. Among his duties will be liaison with development agencies and fund-raising for a broad range of projects.

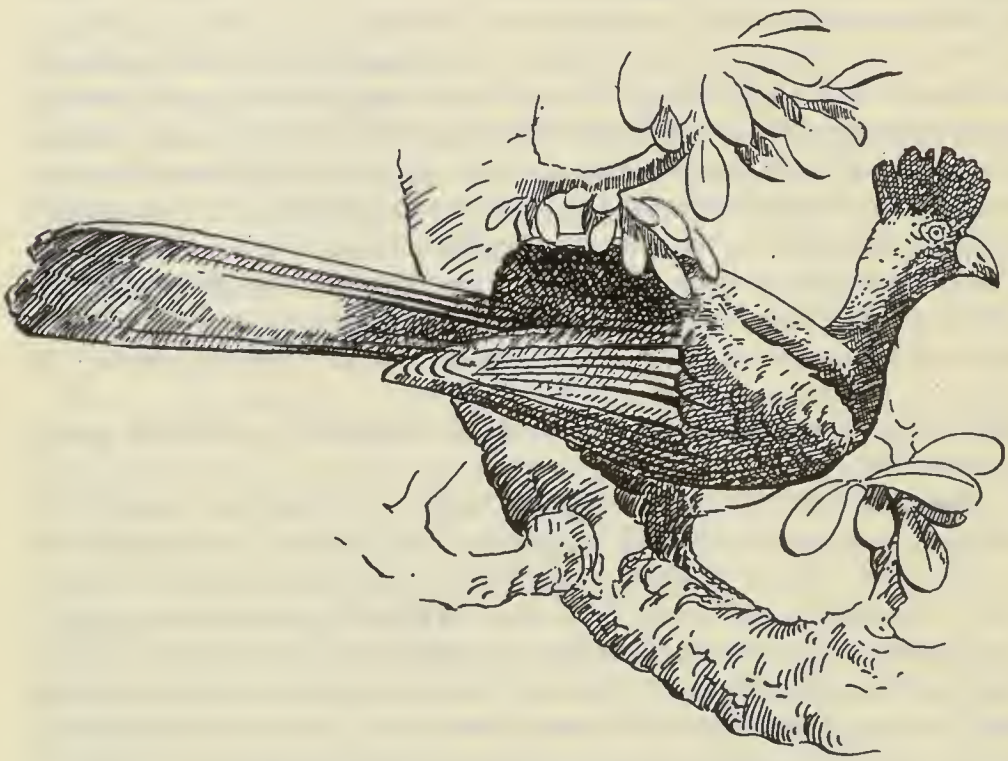
PAOC 1996 — Standard Chartered Bank announces awards to young ornithologists

The Ninth Pan-African Ornithological Congress will be held from 17–23 October 1996 in Banjul, capital of the Gambia. The Standard Chartered Bank has announced two awards to assist young African ornithologists attend the Congress. A scholarship will cover all the costs of attending, while a bursary will cover all costs apart from the air-fare. The awards are competitive, are for African nationals only, and will be judged from papers proposed for presentation at the Congress. Applicants should send a title for their paper, plus an abstract of no more than 300 words explaining its purpose, expected results and biological, environmental or conservation importance, to: R Trevor Wilson, Bartridge Partners, Umberleigh, Devon EX37 9AS, UK, by 30 June 1994 (note the date!).

Bird Family Profiles

Turacos

John Fanshawe, P O Box 40658, Nairobi



Great Blue Turaco — *Martin Woodcock*

The turacos and their savanna cousins, the go-away birds, belong to a family confined to Africa, the Musophagidae. Eleven species occur in Kenya (they are listed with their scientific names at the end of this paper). Their closest relatives were once thought to be the cuckoos, but many authorities consider they may be closer to owls and nightjars. All are round-winged and long-tailed, and have rather weak and floppy flight, tending to climb to high points and then launch themselves to glide to the next tree. They have strong legs and feet with a mobile outer toe that can point forwards or backwards. As a result, they are extremely agile on foot as they clamber through bushes and trees, often running along

branches with confident hops. Of all the group, the Great Blue Turaco is most associated with Kakamega; its raucous *kok-kok-kok* call echoes through the forest and signals a procession of hopping, jumping, crested birds with bill seemingly manufactured out of red and yellow plastic!

Turaco colours are altogether remarkable. The savanna go-away birds are dully plumaged in soft grey, buff and white, but the forest turacos are a rich assortment of greens and blues, and sport spectacular flashes of crimson-red in their wings. The red pigment, *turacin*, and the green, *turcoverdin*, are the only pigments found in the animal kingdom which contain copper, but a long-standing belief that red and green turaco colours are water soluble and wash out in the rain is misplaced. Many turacos also have bright red eye-wattles and attractive face patterning. Many species also have crests, often pronounced like that of Schalow's Turaco (which occurs in riverine forest in the Maasai Mara).

Red wing flashes are important in signalling to other turacos, as well as to birders trying to locate birds in the canopy! Despite their size and bright colours, stationary turacos can be hard to see. They often freeze stock-still when disturbed, peering at the ground with craned necks in a rather dove-like manner. Incubating birds sit tight, only moving a short distance if they are flushed from their nests. One of the hardest species to spot is the shy and elusive Black-billed Turaco which is confined to Kakamega, South Nandi and Kaimosi in Kenya.

Most species are gregarious and are encountered in pairs or small family parties, sometimes a number will gather to exploit a particular food resource. As a group turacos are not at all well known behaviourally, at least not in the wild. Like the parrots, they are much better known in captivity because they breed easily and make popular pets. They are all noisy and the savanna go-away birds have gained their wonderful name from the harsh nasal *gaa-gaa-wayrrr* cries they make in the bush.

Although the calls of the so-called green turacos are extremely familiar in forest, they all appear fairly similar to each other — a sort of gruff barking. It is often hard to appreciate how important they are in helping to distinguish species. Work by Bob Dowsett and Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire suggest there are six closely related green turacos, three of which occur in Kenya: Black-billed, Schalow's, and Fischer's. All three have restricted ranges, Black-billed and Schalow's in the west and south-west respectively, with Fischer's confined to mature coastal forests. Analysis of the calls of these species, alongside morphological features like crest size and shape, and face patterning, has been critical in separating them.

Most are frugivores, specialising on fruit and less frequently taking leaves, buds and flowers. Like sunbirds, they possibly switch to a more insectivorous

diet when feeding young (see Kenya Birds 1(2): 35–37). They clamber through the foliage in search of food and may gather in parties in fruiting trees along with green pigeons, parrots and fruit eating barbets. Birds often return to the same trees day after day until the food resources are exhausted. They are known to eat some fruits and leaves that are poisonous to mammals. They are also rather wasteful feeders, dropping much of the fruit they try to pick. Rarely, they drop to the ground to pick up fallen food themselves, but more often their rather messy habits are a bonanza for ground-dwelling small mammals! Fruits are 'handled' in the bill and swallowed.

As far as is known, turacos nest in monogamous pairs, defending territories from neighbours. White-bellied Go-away Birds do, however, regularly gather in noisy groups and display with much tail waving and bobbing about. For the whole family, tail fanning appears to be a regular aggressive signal during territorial disputes. Brilliant crimson wing feathers are flashed during courtship, heads are shaken to draw attention to head-markings, billing occurs, and the male often courtship-feeds the female by regurgitation.

Turacos all build flat nests, like those of doves, and light often shows through the flimsy structures. Both sexes are thought to build, although it may be that one remains at the nest, accepting materials gathered by its mate. Two or three eggs are laid, and the young hatch after an incubation of approximately three weeks shared by both sexes. They are soon clambering in branches close to the nest, are fed by regurgitation, and fledge in about a month. Chicks have a large wide gape and the parent bird settles its bill crossways to feed them, allowing liquid food to dribble into the youngster's bill. The chicks stimulate regurgitation by pushing at their parents' breasts with their soft bills. After feeding, the adult encourages the chick to rear its rump, massages the cloaca, and swallows its liquid faeces!

Because of their loud, far-carrying calls, it is easy to imagine there are more turacos around than is in fact the case. For many, like Black-billed, encroachment on their habitat is a real threat, and records of all the species with restricted ranges, especially Fischer's and Purple-crested, should be sent in to *Kenya Birds*.

The eleven Kenya species with their scientific names are: Great Blue Turaco *Corythaeola cristata*, White-bellied Go-away Bird *Corythaixoides leucogaster*, Bare-faced Go-away Bird *C. personata*, Ross's Turaco *Musophaga rossae*, Eastern Grey Plaintain eater *Crinifer zonurus*, Fischer's Turaco *Tauraco fischeri*, Hartlaub's Turaco *T. hartlaubi*, White-crested Turaco *T. leucolophus*, Schalow's Turaco *T. schalowi*, Violet-crested Turaco *T. porphyreolophus* and Black-billed Turaco *T. schuetti*.

Birding in... Kakamega

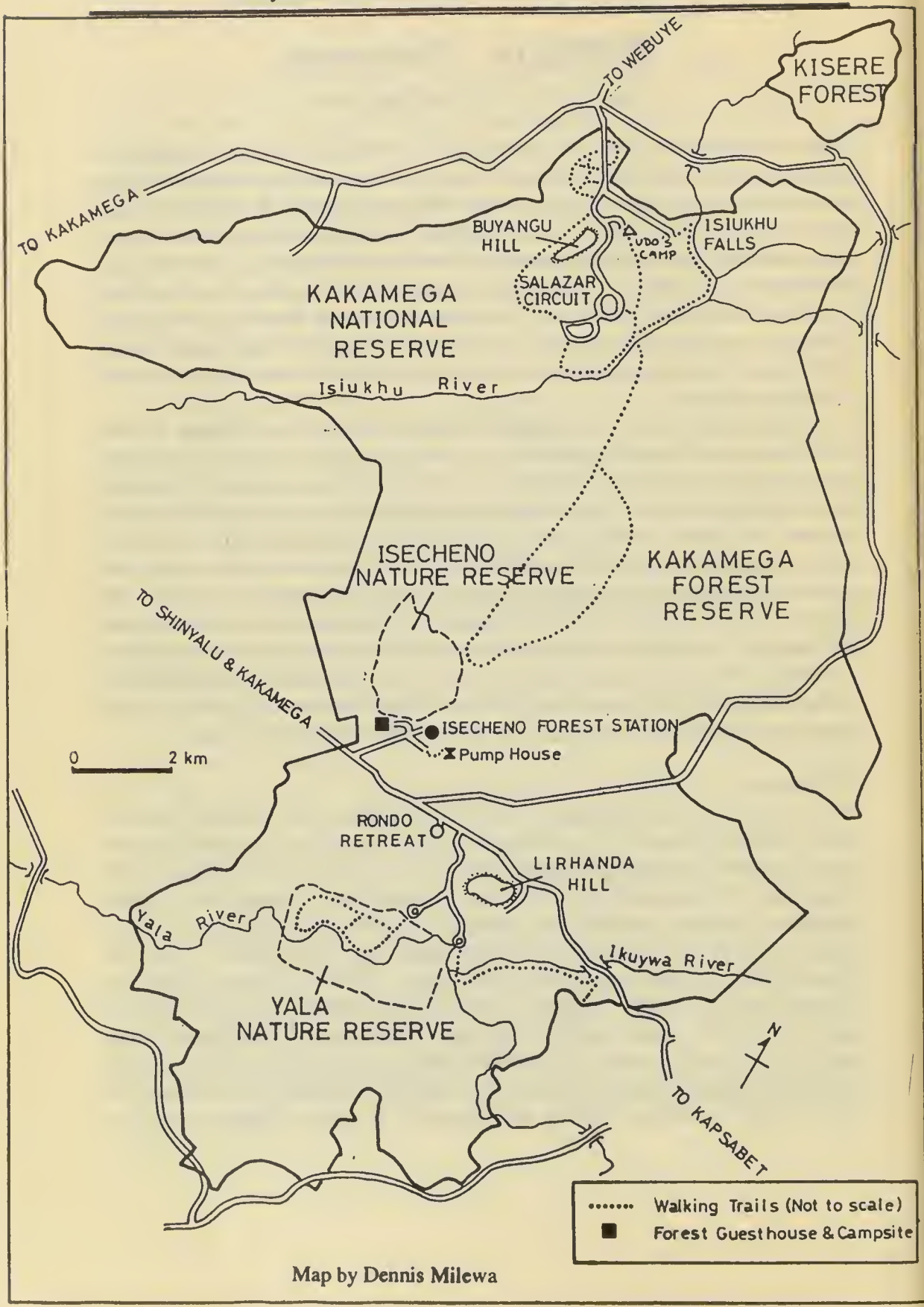
Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

This article should perhaps start with a personal confession. I have been entranced by the *idea* of Kakamega Forest since about the age of twelve — long before I ever had a chance to go there. This was probably the result of hours spent poring over the old version of Williams' field guide (the second volume, the tantalising '*Rarer* Birds of East Africa') and a mouldering copy of Mackworth-Praed and Grant, filling my head with images and the resonant names of birds such as Red-headed Malimbes, Black-faced Rufous Warblers, Pink-footed Puffbacks and Equatorial Akalats. In my mind the forest took on almost magical qualities: an intensely exciting place where 'new' birds would spring out from behind every bush.

For once, reality did not disappoint. Kakamega *is* a magical place for any birdwatcher, and I shall never forget my first visit there — or any of the many subsequent ones. In Kenya, Kakamega is unique: the last isolated outlier of the great lowland forests of central and west Africa. Very many of its plants and animals are found nowhere else in the country, including at least 16 lowland forest bird species. (About 30 other birds are known historically from elsewhere in western Kenya, but are very hard to find outside Kakamega itself.) But it is the sheer richness of Kakamega that fascinates and sometimes bewilders: at least 360 species of birds have been recorded within the Forest Reserve boundaries. Of these, about 194 are dependent on forest, the rest preferring grassland or woodland habitats. The non-forest birds are not to be ignored for they include many interesting and unusual species characteristic of western Kenya.

The forest

Kakamega is a complex and fragmented forest. This can best be appreciated by the view from Lirhanda Hill in the south, or Buyangu Hill in the north. The two main blocks of indigenous forest to the north and south are now connected only by a narrow strip along the Ikuywa River; they form part of a mosaic of habitats including grassland, old shambas, secondary growth and plantations of indigenous or exotic tree species. A lot of Kakamega is not 'forest' at all. In fact, the Reserve has for years been under attack from within and without, a process beginning with the colonial forest service in the early decades of the century. The central part of the forest has bit by bit been hacked away by the foresters and replaced by plantations or open grassland (adding to the numerous natural glades in swampy areas or places where the soil is shallow). Meanwhile, excisions and illegal clearing nibbled away at the perimeter. From Lirhanda can be seen



Map by Dennis Milewa

isolated tall trees, hundreds of metres beyond the present edge at the forest. Their long straight trunks once enabled them to raise their leaves above the canopy; now they look completely out of place and testify to the extent of encroachment over the past few years.

The southern and central part of the forest is Forest Reserve run by the Forest Department. It includes (in theory) two nature reserves, Yala in the south and Isecheno, by the forest station, in the centre. The northern third or so is a National Reserve run by the Kenya Wildlife Service. The KWS appears to have been quite successful at protecting this forest block; many areas of grass and bushland are regenerating, while signs of disturbance in the forest itself are minimal. The south is in much less good shape: the grassland areas are maintained by (illegal) grazing, which gives woody vegetation no chance to take hold, while tree poaching for timber and charcoal, and the old problem of encroachment, continue apace.

The little indigenous forest remaining in Kakamega is steadily diminishing in extent and becoming more fragmented: this is a very serious conservation problem, especially for many scarce and sedentary forest birds. Meanwhile, the swampy glades, which are home to many unusual grassland species, are continuously disturbed by grazing. Since 1991 the Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Programme (KIFCON) has been operating a pilot forest conservation project in Kakamega. Many innovative approaches involving community participation and development have been planned or put into operation. Unfortunately, the second phase of this project will now not go ahead. Nonetheless, each visitor to the forest helps to bring in income and justify keeping the area in its natural state — simply by being there you are doing your bit for conservation!

How to get there

Kakamega town itself is about 418 km from Nairobi, via Nakuru and Kapsabet. The easiest route is to take the A104 towards Eldoret, as far as Timboroa; 4 km further on is a left turn onto the C36 to Kapsabet. This joins the C39 just before Kapsabet, and another left turn takes you through Kapsabet and eventually onto the Kisumu-Kakamega road.

The forest itself can be approached in three ways. To access the northern section (the National Reserve), drive north from Kakamega town towards Webuye. Sixteen kilometres from Kakamega is a right turn onto a murram road, signposted 'Kakamega National Reserve'. This road takes you through a section of forest and then forks: left for the Reserve headquarters (where you should check in) and Isiukhu Falls, right for the campsite, Buyangu Hill and other forest trails (see map). Fifty metres further along the main road is another murram road

to the right, leading to Kambiri village and Kisere Forest, an outlier of Kakamega with a population of De Brazza monkeys.

To access the southern section from Kapsabet, drive on along the C39, which will take you gently down the Nandi Escarpment and into view of the forest stretching away to the north. Nineteen kilometres from Kapsabet (usually just beyond a police road block) is a murram track to the right with several signposts: the most obvious are to 'Kiborgok Tea Estate', 'Wizara wa Afya — Kaimosi Farmers' and 'Ikuywa Church Community Centre', but there is also an 'MENR Forest Department' sign, indicating 14 km to the Forest Station, and a small sign to 'Rondo Retreat, 10 km'. This road is usually in fairly good condition, but can have the occasional sticky patch after rain; continue down it, ignoring a right turn after 2 km to Kaimosi Farmers; the edge of the forest is reached after 3 km, and a steep rocky section soon brings one down to the Ikuywa River. The road then leads through degraded forest and plantations, past Rondo Retreat on the left (at 10 km), a junction to the right at 11 km, and a signposted right-hand turn to the Isecheno Forest Station at 13 km.

Continuing along the same road, one reaches the trading centre of Shinyalu; taking a right fork eventually leads one to Kakamega town itself. To reach the Forest Station from Kakamega simply reverse this route, taking the road to Shinyalu (which branches left off the Kakamega-Eldoret road just before one leaves the town heading south, and is signposted for the Forest Station) and thence to Isecheno. This is usually a fairly easy drive, if bumpy in places. Both the National Reserve and the Forest Station can be accessed from the town by public transport.

Birdwatching sites and trails

Ideally a birding visit to Kakamega should take in a variety of habitats: dense forest, forest edge, woodland and bushland, and tall grassland. With the establishment of the National Reserve, and KIFCON's recent efforts to boost eco-tourism, there is much more choice now about where to birdwatch.

In the National Reserve

A good place to start (after first checking in at the KWS office) is *Udo's Camp*. This is a glade by a forest patch, and a good place to see some edge species such as Grey-winged Ground Robin and African Thrush (both very vocal in the evenings). Mid-morning there is often a lot of activity in the trees in and around the camp, and fruiting *Solanum* bushes attract greenbuls. The grassland at the camp entrance is a good site for White-tailed Nightjar, Marsh Tchagra and Yellow-mantled Widowbird. At night we have seen Potto (a mammalian bonus) in the camp's big *Acacia abyssinica* trees.

From Udo's Camp a walking trail leads south to the Isiukhu River and (eventually) Isecheno, with a branch towards Isiukhu Falls (a good site for Mountain Wagtail). (For those with wheels, the Falls are more easily approached by vehicle, with a walk for the last kilometre or so: see map.) These trails pass mainly through woodland and bushland, of interest for some species (and often full of life in the early morning) but generally less exciting than the forest. A short trail also leads back to the headquarters, through a small river valley, and this can be worth a look.

Red-chested Owlet — *Kelvin Oram*

On either side of the road leading in to the reserve are trails cut into the forest. I have only explored a few of these, but the birding seems good, although the forest is somewhat degraded. Those with a vehicle may wish to continue further south, past Buyangu Hill (well worth a walk up for impressive views over the forest, plus swifts and raptors visible above the canopy) and on to the Salazar Circuit. From the second loop of the circuit, a walking trail leads down towards the Isiukhu River. From survey work in a nearby transect, we know this to be one of the richest parts of the forest, and a likely site for special birds such as White-spotted Pygmy Crake, Red-chested Owlet, African Broadbill, Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye and Grey-chested Illadopsis. A visit to either this area or Yala (see below) is recommended.

At and around Isecheno

The area around Isecheno Forest Station is the best-known birding spot in Kakamega. Just north of the Station is a grid of trails, first established in the 1960s by Dale Zimmerman for a bird population study. The grid provides very convenient access to the Isecheno Nature Reserve, which, despite the depredations of pole-cutters and trampling cattle, still contains an excellent variety of forest birds. Thanks to the pole-cutting there are fewer small trees here than elsewhere, and it is a very long way up to the canopy in places (small birds in the treetops can be next to invisible); it is also surprisingly easy to become lost in the grid — take care, or preferably a guide. Primates are abundant here if you are keen on monkey-watching.

Beyond this forest patch is Kalunya Glade, a roughly triangular grassland area. Once this was a favoured haunt of many grassland species, but these have mostly vanished in recent years as the grass has been grazed down so much. We have seen numbers of African and European Hobbies here, along with myriads of swallows, at times when winged termites are emerging.

The Guest House itself looks out directly on the forest edge and this area can be very productive, especially in the early to mid morning. Greenbuls of various species are often in evidence; it is a good site for Little and Little Grey, and sometimes Shelley's. Walking back past the Forest Officer's house and the nurseries takes one on to the Pumphouse Trail, which passes at the edge of indigenous plantation and then through dense scrub down to a small stream. Vieillot's Black Weaver nests near the Forest Department nursery, close to the Forest Officer's house, and Mackinnon's Shrike and White-headed Rough-wing are often seen along the initial open section. As the trail drops down to the pumphouse it offers good views into the treetops of fairly intact forest. Many species of dense low growth (such as Lühder's Bush Shrike, Red-headed Bluebill, Black-billed Weaver, White-chinned and Banded Prinia) can be seen (or at least heard!) along this trail.

Rondo Retreat

Access is restricted, but if you are staying there the grounds of the Retreat are superb for birdwatching, especially for forest-edge species and large fruit-eaters. Both in the Rondo gardens and the surrounding river valleys, the vegetation is much more open than in the forest itself and it is much easier to see the birds. A good site for hornbills, Grey Parrots, Great Blue Turaco and Snowy-headed Robin Chat among others.

Ikuywa River

The Ikuywa River has been the site of choice for birding tours to the forest. The trail up from the river allows views over the trees at various levels, and a surprisingly good selection of birds is usually in evidence, given how disturbed this part of the forest is. This is a good site for the elusive Black-billed Turaco.

The bridge over the Ikuywa itself was formerly considered the best site for Sabine's Spinetail, especially in the late evening, but I have not seen this species there for many years.

Recently a new walking trail has been cut along the southern edge of the Ikuywa, crossing the river near its confluence with the Yala and heading up to a road through the grassland south of Lirhanda Hill (see map). This provides a very pleasant walk through an interesting part of the forest. The grassland itself holds White-throated Bee-eaters at the right time of year; when roadside plants such as *Leonotis* are in flower, they attract quantities of sunbirds as well.

Yala Nature Reserve

Just beyond Rondo (heading away from Kakamega town) is a track to the right; following this takes one through plantations and grassland to the edge of Yala River Nature Reserve. A new trail leads in to the Reserve, one of the best remaining pieces of forest (although under increasing pressure from tree poaching and charcoaling). The path leads down to the river, with pretty views, and does a double circuit round to provide either a long or a short walk. This area is excellent for most dense-forest species, including Bar-tailed Trogon, Blue-headed Bee-eater, Turner's Eremomela, Southern Hyliota, Shrike Flycatcher and all the wattle-eyes; we have also seen Ayre's Hawk Eagle here. The trails are presently fairly narrow and are not suitable for a big group of birders.

Forest birding

Birding in Kakamega, as in other high forests, can at times be frustrating: sometimes the forest may seem totally birdless; sometimes you can see only specks moving high against the sky in the canopy, or a greenbul frustratingly silhouetted against the light. A good view of a Red-headed Malimbe or a Blue-headed Bee-eater, or a sudden party of fifteen different species, makes it all worthwhile.

Unless you simply want to enjoy the dawn chorus (and it can be magnificent in Kakamega), there is little point in rushing into the forest at daybreak. It takes quite some time for light to penetrate the canopy and the birds do not move around much at first. When you do go in, move slowly and quietly; stop and listen frequently, and look for movement above and around you. Bird activity is greatest in the morning; the early afternoon is often hot, with an overcast sky and

little moving. Expect a thunderstorm by mid-afternoon on most days.

You will probably hear a lot more than you see, and your enjoyment may be greatly enhanced if you go into the forest with a guide. A number of professional guides, mainly trained by KIFCON, are now based at Isecheno and Buyangu. They know the birds well. By taking a guide you will have the additional satisfaction of helping to create local employment and thus, in a small but significant way, assist forest conservation.

Forest sounds

Many of the common Kakamega sounds are easily learned. Illadopses, ground-dwelling babblers that are hard to see and identify, make some of the loveliest calls at dawn. A slow three-note whistle in a minor key is the Scaly-breasted; a single slow rising whistle, followed after an interval by a descending one, is the Brown: its whistles are often interspersed with a loud twanging sound, probably made by another individual. The Bristlebill sings a series of rapid descending trills (see the Greenbul article, this issue). The Black-faced Rufous Warbler sings a monotonous series of long, loud whistles all on the same note; two birds singing together sound like a fire-engine siren. The Uganda Woodland Warbler has a brief, cheerful, musical song, exploding suddenly from the treetops; the rather similar-looking Green Hylia also has a sudden call, a loud two-note descending *see-sweer*. The African Broadbill has a loud frog-like mechanical call, *brrrrrruurp*!. Square-tailed Drongos make an astonishing variety of sounds, characteristically a harsh *dee-djack*! as well as many musical notes. Dark-backed Weavers sound a bit like a pinball game in full swing, with a melange of extraordinary buzzes, whistles and harmonic squeaks that any avant-garde composer could be proud of. Jameson's Wattle-eye sings the first phrase of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in a fast high whistle, slightly off-key. In swampy valleys listen for the White-spotted Pygmy Crake, a long fast series of rounded bell-like whistles, *gong-gong-gong-gong-gong-gong-gong-gong*. Its close relative, the Buff-spotted Pygmy Crake, has a loud eerie foghorn call, gradually dying away like a tuning fork. The Blue-shouldered Robin Chat will imitate your whistle and improve on it in its own, inimitable, fashion. And keep your ears tuned for that most characteristic of Kakamega sounds, the ear-splitting, *kok-kok-kok* crowing chorus of the Great Blue Turacos.

Where to stay

Isecheno Guest House and Camp Site

Next door to the Forester's house at Isecheno, the Guest House has four double bedrooms upstairs with beds and bathrooms, and two kitchens downstairs. Its

construction is charmingly eccentric or ramshackle, depending on your point of view; water supply in the bathrooms is a trickle at best, but there are more reliable taps in the kitchens. The place needs a good spring-cleaning and general renovation, but is certainly convenient and inexpensive. The verandah upstairs looks out over the forest edge and is a pleasant place to while away an afternoon.

Close by is a new campsite, with covered cooking area, washroom and latrine.

For both the Guest House and campsite, you need to bring your own food, cooking equipment and bedding; buckets and/or karais for bathing are recommended. Book by writing to: The Forester, Kakamega Forest Station, P O Box 88, Kakamega.

Udo's Bandas and Camp Site

Situated in a pretty glade close to the KWS office in the Kakakmega National Reserve, the camp is named after Udo Savalli who spent several years in Kakamega studying the Yellow-mantled Widowbirds. There are (or soon will be) seven thatched rondavels accommodating 14 people, and a large covered area for cooking and dining. Water can be fetched from a stream near the camp (it is a steep climb, although not far, and the stream is small) or from the KWS camp, where there are rain-water tanks. Visitors should bring their own food, cooking equipment and bedding. Book through: The District Warden, Kenya Wildlife Service, P O Box 879, Kakamega.

Golf Hotel, Kakamega

For those not enthused by the thought of camping, the Golf Hotel offers pleasant and comfortable accommodation in the heart of Kakamega town. The 144-bed hotel is surrounded by quiet green space (a large garden and the adjacent golf course) but this is rather birdless. Staff are friendly and facilities good; the management are used to the idiosyncracies of birdwatchers and happy to produce a pre-dawn breakfast and lunch-boxes if warned. Book through: The Manager, The Golf Hotel, P O Box 118, Kakamega (tel. 0331 20125/30150).

Rondo Retreat

The former house of a saw-miller, built in 1928, Rondo is now managed by the Trinity Fellowship as a retreat centre. Visitors can stay either in the main house or in bungalows arranged about the grounds; there are 21 beds in total. Accommodation is very comfortable and full board is available. The grounds are beautifully laid out and excellent for birdwatching, and Rondo is altogether a peaceful and delightful place. No alcohol, however, visitors should note. Book (well in advance) through: The Rev. Michael Carlisle, P O Box 2153, Kakamega, or call 0331 20145 on Thursdays between 14:00 and 17:00.

Records and Notes

This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations, and contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records to ***Kenya Birds****, please consider the following guidelines. For* ***breeding records****, send in cases of CONFIRMED breeding, i.e. birds incubating eggs or feeding nestlings/fledglings. Records of confirmed breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of nest-building, courtship etc. are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. You are strongly urged to fill in a* ***nest-record card*** *at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published every second year in the Annual Bird Report of* Scopus.

For other records of ***Afrotropicalloceanic*** *birds and* ***Palaearctic*** *birds, please send in any sightings and notes that you think are of interest. The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. For* ***all*** *records, including breeding records, please be as precise as possible about* ***dates*** *and* ***locations****. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these records when we begin, very soon, to update and refine the present Bird Atlas of Kenya by computerising bird distribution records.*

Supporting details are always welcomed for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication. Records of certain species are requested for inclusion in the Scopus *Annual Bird Report (the third issue of* Scopus *each year). These should be sent to Don Turner (P O Box 48019, Nairobi), who can also supply information on which records are required. For particularly unusual sightings supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the OS-C Rarities Committee.*

Key to records

New atlas square records are indicated in square brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres**, present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probable breeding; **conf**, confirmed breeding; **post conf**, confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. **[pres, conf 25B]** indicates that the species is present and confirmed as breeding in square 25B.

Where scientific names are not stated here (and elsewhere in *Kenya Birds*) the English names follow Britton (ed.) 1980 *Birds of East Africa*.

Breeding records

Abdim's Stork: Maseno 1–7/93 and 1/94 JA (see article, this issue). **Crowned Plover**: Adult with three eggs, Nakuru NP 12/8/93 LL. **Spotted Thicknee [conf 60C]**: Pair with two newly-hatched chicks, Mbita Point, L. Victoria 8/9/93 DR. **Orange-bellied Parrot [conf 51B]**: Feeding young in nest hole at top of Doum Palm, Samburu 20/5/93 YMC. **Verreaux's Eagle Owl [conf 48D]**: Maseno 7–9/93 JA (see article, this issue). **Speckled Mousebird**: Nest with two eggs, Nakuru NP 11/7/93 LL. **Ruppell's Robin Chat**: Adult feeding one young, Nairobi early 12/93 FN. **White-browed Robin Chat**: Feeding young, Sotik 1/11/93 I&PF. **Northern**

Olive Thrush: Adult feeding one young, Nairobi late 12/93 FN. **Ashy Cisticola [conf 51B]**: Pair nesting in grass, mobbing Pygmy Falcon, Samburu 20/5/93 YMC. **Fiscal Shrike**: Female feeding immature, Nanyuki 14/3/93 MH. **Blue-eared Glossy Starling**: Adult feeding immature, Nanyuki 13–14/3/93 MH. **Yellow-billed Oxpecker**: Adults with four immatures, Nairobi NP 23/1/94 FN. **Amethyst Sunbird**: Feeding young, Sotik 12/11/93 I&PF. **Bronze Sunbird**: Feeding young, Sotik 22/9/93 I&PF; feeding one young, Nairobi late 11/93 FN. **Green-headed Sunbird**: Feeding young, Sotik 17/8/93 I&PF. **Donaldson-Smith's Sparrow Weaver**: Many young calling from nests, Samburu 20/5/93 YMC. **Spectacled Weaver**: Pair feeding two young, Naivasha 30/1/94 FN. **Red-billed Firefinch**: Parents feeding several young, Nairobi late 1/94 FN.

Other records: Afrotropical species

Little Grebe [pres 48D]: Maseno University Dam 11/93 JA. **Darter**: Mzima Springs 20/6/93 YMC. **Little Egret, Grey Heron, Black-headed Heron [all pres 59D]**: Remba Island, L. Victoria 9/9/93 DR. **Rufous-bellied Heron**: Three at Musiara Swamp, Mara GR 7/93 BF. **Open-billed Stork, Sacred Ibis, Egyptian Goose [all pres 59D]**: Remba Island, L. Victoria 9/9/93 DR. **Palm-nut Vulture**: Feeding on carrion, Ziwani, Taveta 20/6/93 YMC. **Black Kite [pres 59D]**: Remba Island, L. Victoria 9/9/93 DR. **Lizard Buzzard [post pres 48D]**: Maseno, many dates 1993 JA; Nairobi NP 21/7/93 BF. **Blue Quail [post pres 48D]**: Male found dead, Maseno 30/7/93 JA. **Grey Crowned Crane** ***Balearica regulorum***: Sixty feeding on ploughed land, Iten 16/5/93 YMC. **White-spotted Pygmy Crake**: Calling at a swamp near Yala, 7/93 BF. **Spur-winged Plover, Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Lesser Black-backed Gull [all pres 59D]**: Remba Island, L. Victoria 9/9/93 DR. **Brown Parrot [pres 75B]**: Nairobi NP, 21/7/93 BF *(a "perfectly wild" bird, "must be the drought" — BF: this is a rare event, a new atlas square record for Nairobi)*. **Blue-headed Coucal [post pres 48D]**: Maseno University, 11/93 JA. **Black Coucal [pres 100B]**: Pair Ziwani, Taveta 19/6/93 YMC. **White-faced Scops Owl [post pres 48D]**: Maseno, many dates 1993 JA. **Little and Nyanza Swifts [both pres 59D]**: Remba Island, L. Victoria 9/9/93 DR. **Madagascar Bee-eater**: Large flock over Nairobi 1/6/93 YMC. **Broad-billed Roller**: Nairobi NP 21/7/93 BF. **Brown-breasted Barbet [post pres 100B]**: Ziwani, Taveta 20/6/93 YMC. **Yellow-rumped, Moustached Green and Red-fronted Tinkerbirds**: All feeding on mistletoe berries on one tree, Nairobi Arboretum 18/8/93 FN. **Angola Swallow [pres 59D]**: Remba Island, L. Victoria 9/9/93 DR. **Blue Swallow: [post pres 48C]**: Madende Creek, 7/93 BF. **Grey-olive Greenbul**: Blue Posts Hotel, Thika, 7/93 BF. **Yellow-bellied Greenbul [post pres 51D]**: Meru Forest, 7/93 BF. **Red-tailed Chat [pres 74A]**: Siana Springs, 7/93 BF. **Brown-chested Alethe**: Meru Forest, 7/93 BF. **Carruther's Cisticola**: One, Nyagowa Beach on the Kendu Bay-Ongalo-Palo road 29/10/93 JA. **White-winged Warbler [pres 48D]**: Yala River at Yala, 7/93 BF. **Green Crombec**: Madende Creek, 7/93 BF. **Gambaga Flycatcher**: One, Kerio Valley 7/93 BF. **Pringle's Puffback**: "At the first creek off the Ngong Hills towards Magadi, the third time I have had them at that spot, where there is also a pair of Bare-eyed Thrushes", 7/93 BF. **Fiscal Shrike**: A melanistic individual, Lake Nakuru NP 12/9/93 DR. **Grey-crested Helmet Shrike [post pres 75C]**: South Nguruman 30/9/93 YMC. **Wattled Starling**: Carnivore, Nairobi 20 & 25/6/93 FN. **Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird**: Buda Forest Reserve, Kwale 29/8/93 EMW & LAB. **Shining Sunbird**: Baringo 7/93 BF. **Superb Sunbird**: Adungosi 7/93 BF. **Golden-winged Sunbird**:

Kavoga Hill, Sotik 25/7/93 I&PF. **Rufous-tailed Weaver**: A group of this Tanzania endemic only 5 km south of the Kenya border, near Bologonja River, Serengeti 27/8/93 DR. **Chestnut Weaver**: Loresho, Nairobi 19/5/93 NM; Carnivore, Nairobi 20/6/93 FN. **Red-headed Quelea**: 200+, Kisumu 7/93 BF. **Locust Finch [pres 48C]**: Pair, Mungatsi (Madende Creek) 7/93 BF. **Stripe-breasted Seed-eater**: Nine feeding in sorghum, Timau 7/93 BF.

Other records: Palaearctic species

White Stork: Over 100 flying over Maseno towards Kisumu, 28/12/93 JA. **Red-necked Stint [pres 88C]**: One in full breeding plumage, Amboseli 20/8/93 DR *[only the third record for Kenya]*. **Spotted Redshank**: One in full plumage, Baringo 7/93 BF. **Curlew**: One seen Baringo 8/93 HG. **Eurasian Bee-eaters**: Flock near Kisii, 11/9/93 DR; first seen Sotik on 20/9/93, I&PF; many, Nairobi NP 26/9/93 FN. **Whinchat**: Carnivore, Nairobi 2/10/93 FN. **Yellow Wagtail**: First seen Sotik on 20/10/93 I&PF. **Blackcap**: Three pairs feeding on mulberries, Sotik 21/11/93 I&PF.

Contributors
BF, Brian Finch; DR, Dave Richards; EMW, Edward Waiyaki; FN, Fleur Ng'weno; HG, Hilary Garland; I&PF: Ian & Pamela Francombe; JA, Jeam Agutu; LAB, Leon Bennun; LL, Laban Lumwachi; MH, Mavis Heath; NM, Nina Mudida; YMC, Yvonne Malcolm-Coe.

House Sparrow seen on Magadi Road

Brian Finch *(P O Box 59749, Nairobi)* writes: "Today (22 October 1993) I was on the Magadi Road — bird of the day (!) was a pair of House Sparrows at the Magadi Supermarket: what a horrible discovery." Has anyone else seen this invader, which has been spreading up the Mombasa Road but has not so far been recorded so far West? Remember that the male House Sparrow has a dull brown back and grey rump, and a dark brown patch on 'ears' and nape; the Rufous Sparrow has a rufous rump and back, and a rufous 'ear' patch extending to the nape.

More Emerald Cuckoos

More readers have written in to say that they have heard the unusual Emerald Cuckoo calls described in previous issues of *Kenya Birds*. Joan Grumbley *(P O Box 420, Malindi)* recalls "a long time ago...I cannot remember the time of year" hearing a "very loud noise, a beautiful bell-like sound...I found two male Emerald Cuckoos in a bush walking up and down fluttering their wings and making this wonderful noise. This went on for about ten minutes. It was staggering...I have never seen or heard anything like it since." Fiona Reid, writing from Kibale Forest *(P O Box 409, Fort Portal, Uganda)* says that she has heard the song there and had thought it was a special Kibale phenomenon. Any other records? It would be interesting to know what the cuckoos are actually up to...

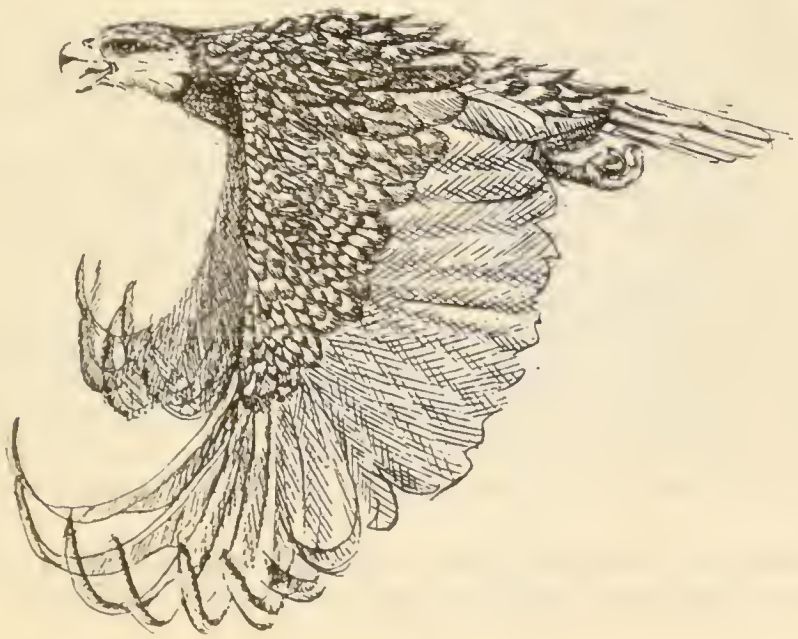
The rehabilitation of a Madagascar Fish Eagle

The Madagascar Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vociferoides* is one of the world's rarest eagles and its seventh rarest bird of prey. Only 45–50 pairs were thought to exist in 1985.

The reasons for their decline are, as so often, habitat destruction, siltation of rivers and lakes, and human persecution. Madagascar has already lost two large eagles, and if the trends continue it will lose yet another.

Conservation policies for this eagle are simple but unbelievably difficult to achieve. As always the goals are to save and increase the habitat and stop human disturbance. One of the easiest options that achieves immediate and obvious results is artificially increasing eagle numbers. This can offset human persecution and if used together with habitat conservation forms an excellent conservation package. The simplest and least invasive method is to rescue "Abel"...

Many eagles lay two eggs. One will hatch up to four days in advance of the other. This "first born" grows rapidly and may be well over twice the weight of the younger chick when it hatches. Not only is the younger chick out-competed for food, it is savagely attacked and persecuted at every opportunity. Just why "Cain" kills "Abel" is a hotly disputed argument amongst ornithologists. Whatever the evolutionary origin of this behaviour, in the management of rare



Madagascar Fish Eagle — *Simon Thomsett*

eagles it opens up the possibility of doubling the total output of young. This can be achieved simply by raising one of the chicks in captivity, and returning it later when competition is not life-threatening.

In June 1993 I was asked by Dr Rick Watson, project director for both Kenya and Madagascar of the Peregrine Fund. Inc., to go to Madagascar and assist in 'Abel' rescue of Madagascar Fish Eagles. There I was met by Richard Lewis, the local director, and we drove for four days to the region. Familiar only with Kenya I was surprised to see vast areas with very few people, but, like home, all these areas had been negatively influenced by man. Our destination was one of the few lakes which was still surrounded by forests. The Lake Ankerika complex lies just a few kilometres inland on the west coast, and here a small research camp had been set up on a peninsula. Here some ten pairs of eagles nested, giving the region the densest population of Madagascar Fish Eagles known.

The next day (15 July 1993) we climbed a Baobab and removed 'Cain'. To avoid imprinting problems I rotated the chicks every ten days. When returned to their parents after ten days the chicks fed and behaved normally, but if left much longer in captivity they might have permanently shifted their affection to me and thus become useless for release.

During one rotation I noticed that the nest size was pathetically small. Although the Madagascar Fish Eagle is almost identical in size to our African Fish Eagle, it makes far less robust nests. The reason may be that the nest trees are soft timbers, the nest material is weak, and the region is prone to dramatic cyclone winds and rain. With these factors combined, the nest probably degrades quickly and never achieves a great size.

I decided to try and increase the nest size, but before I could do so disaster occurred when one chick fell to its death due to the cramped conditions. A week later the entire nest fell down, with the other chick, during a storm. The lesson learned here resulted in the rest of the nests being significantly enlarged and fortified. In fact I placed an extra nest adjacent to each old one, and placed a fence between the two. This made use of the unique reproductive behaviour of these eagles in which three adults attend to the young. An extra nest with an extra chick proved no problem at all.

The chick that fell with the nest survived with a broken radius and ulna (arm), dislocated meta-carpal joint (wrist), and smashed meta-carpus (hand). We were thousands of kilometres from an X-ray machine and I was obliged to fix the wing by making a splint, out of whittled and steamed sticks, bits of flip-flop and salvaged plastic. After a lot of rearranging the wing was firmly sandwiched in the splint.

My morale sank during this period because many nests were failing due to egg infertility. In addition one chick was sick on its first day and lay with rasping

breath in a paraffin-lamp brooder in my tent. This chick required constant care and my nights were spent injecting it with fluids, vitamins and steroids. In the other corner of the tent slept the chick with a broken wing. One other chick also shared the tent but happily this was healthy.

As the weeks progressed the sick chick made a full recovery and was released; it still flies the lakes together with its sibling. But the chick with the multiple fractures was taken back to Antananarivo and X-rayed by a human doctor. To my delight all the bones were in the correct place. We found that the eagle's plight created considerable public attention, and we received full co-operation for its export to Kenya, even obtaining a free ticket from Air Madagascar. KWS and the BirdLife Kenya committee unravelled all the red tape and got us through.

I took her to Kenya because here we have expert veterinary facilities. Both Dr John Richardson and Dr Paul Sayer made a thorough examination of the bird four days after its arrival. If any corrective surgery was required it was important to do this as soon as possible. However all the fractures were remarkably well-healed. The Robinson Crusoe splint had worked perfectly, but had damaged the flight feathers. I asked Mrs Cecilia Gichuki of the Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya, to lend me an old Verreaux's Eagle specimen. From this I cut off the flight feathers, inserted a wooden dowl and glued these into the hollow shafts of the feathers on the Fish Eagle — an ancient technique called 'imping'. Today she presents a confusion to an ornithologist for she appears a hybrid of different eagles.

At my home on David Hopcraft's ranch at Athi River, I trained the eagle and she flies everyday to perfection. At a call she flies free hundreds of meters to my gloved fist or chases a leather lure for exercise. It would have been ideal to have trained her to take fish from the dams, but the dams are dry due to our poor rainfall.

Now she is set to return home. Her release needs care and time. Heather Tarpley has been trained to handle the eagle at Athi and will soon travel with the eagle to the lakes and there 'hack' her back to the wild. We are now awaiting permission for the eagle to be exported. Unfortunately recent problems within Kenya Wildlife Service mean that they are unable to issue an export permit immediately. With luck this should soon be resolved and the eagle can return to its home lakes in Madagascar. — *Simon Thomsett, P O Box 42818, Nairobi.*

Verreaux's Eagle Owl breeding at Maseno

A pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls built a nest high in a *Tecoma* tree on the Maseno University College campus, close to the office of the Dean of Students. The nest, a large structure of dry twigs and grass, was first seen on 10 July 1993, when it contained a large immature owl. The young bird had grey down covering its body and a short whitish-grey beak; it lacked the black face band of the adults.

The young bird was protected throughout the day by the adult female, which defended it from the regular intrusions of Pied Crows and Vervet Monkeys, as well as shading it from the sun. The male (smaller than his mate) meanwhile hid among the thick foliage of a *Eucalyptus* tree. He took over nest duties when the female left to go hunting at around 08:00, flying out only when she returned.

A few clues to the young owl's food were found beneath the nest. On various dates these included feathers from a Ross's Turaco; fur from a small animal, perhaps a cat or a rabbit; a large pink bird's foot, about 23 cm long, possibly from a Hadada or Abdim's Stork; and the foot of a large bat.

The female and the young bird moved out of the nest during the week ending 26 September 1993. I later found them hiding in a dense clump of *Albizia* and *Eucalyptus*. The male did not change his roosting site.

On the 2 October 1993, the massive nest gave way and emptied the following interesting contents: the right foot of a monitor lizard; a dead frog; several rib bones from an unidentified animal; bits of blanket, shirt collar and polythene. — *Jeam Agutu, Maseno School, P O Box 120, Maseno.*

Does the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill breed in Kenya?

When I compiled the species accounts for *A Bird Atlas of Kenya*, a preliminary appraisal of the distribution maps and other data at my disposal sometimes suggested rather radical assumptions about commonplace and apparently well-known birds. But many of these at first intriguing 'discoveries' could, with sober reflection (something which I often found difficult to achieve...), be put down to vagaries of the Atlas's coverage of both Kenya as a geographical unit, and of Kenya's birds.

Hence a given species might not be recorded from a certain area simply because no or very few birdwatchers ever went there. Or then again, if the area had been visited, perhaps the bird in question is of a very skulking disposition, so that it could easily be overlooked. Or then again, it might be very difficult to identify, and/or very easily confusable with a far commoner species. Or then again again again, observers might be visiting its Kenya range in the wrong season, so that while they were thrashing around trying to find it, it was all the while sunning itself in Eurasia or the southern Afrotropics, etc, etc, etc.

Hence I had to produce an objective as possible assessment of such arguments, in order to attempt to explain what the maps and data really mean. Many of these interpretative arguments are incorporated in the Atlas' text, and Derek Pomeroy and I used the D (Detectability) and C (Coverage) index for each species in an attempt to convey some idea of the completeness and thus meaningfulness of its map.

Of all the apparent 'distributional peculiarities' that the Atlas unearthed, there is none perhaps so instantly intriguing as that of the breeding pattern of the Silver-cheeked Hornbill *Bycanistes brevis*.

Why? Because here we have a well known, large, noisy, obtrusive and apparently resident Kenyan species — for which there is but a single confirmed breeding record, and that from the westernmost extremity of its Kenyan range (Molo, October–March).

What does this mean? Well, on the basis that it must breed *somewhere*, it either does so undiscovered in Kenya or it rgularly migrates to north-east Tanzania or elsewhere. The Silvery-cheeked Hornbill is know to congregate in large (100+) flocks and to make substantial movements to fruiting trees — I can recall (regular?) periods when none were to be found in Nairobi — but intra-African migration on this scale would be something completely new to Kenyan ornithology.

Various points can be made. There *are* records of free-flying but dependent immatures from both the highlands and coast of Kenya, and these have been presumed to indicate nesting — but why have no actual nest holes or nestlings been found? Various authors make no mention of this hornbill being particularly secretive when nesting elsewhere in Africa, and there *are* nesting records for the very similar (and closely related) Black and White Casqued Hornbill *B. subcylindricus*, which lives to the west of the rift valley — in areas which are in fact more poorly known ornithologically than the Silvery-cheeked's range in the Central Highlands (including Nairobi) and the coast (including Mombasa).

Hence three possibilities exist. Either the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill's Kenyan breeding is in fact exceptionally secretive (which would be a notable fact in itself); or it retreats to breed in some little known area(s) of the country, which would also be well worth knowing, particularly on the grounds of conservation; or it migrates out of Kenya altogether to breed, which would be of extreme interest.

On reflection, I suppose there must be a fourth possibility, i.e. that this bird does in fact breed in and around areas like Nairobi quite regularly, but that no one has bothered to send in or mention any record. Well, stranger things have happened... but why not try and find out?

There are three ways forward. Firstly, anyone with *completely certain* records of Silvery-cheeked Hornbills at nest holes *that contain eggs or nestlings* in Kenya should stand up and be counted. Old egg shells would also be a certain pointer. Secondly, everyone should keep this anomaly in mind, so as to be on the lookout for nesting activity whenever the species is present.

And thirdly, even if no evidence of nesting can be found, it would be useful if *Kenya Birds* readers kept at least a year's record of the simple presence or absence of the species in their area, in an attempt to see whether any patterns of movement can be established on a local or national basis. Approximate numbers would also be useful, i.e. there are 2+, 10+, 50+ or 100+ around?

All data should be sent to the Dept. of Ornithology at the National Museum. — *Adrian Lewis, 81 Hazelbury Road, Knowle, Bristol BS14 9ES, UK.*

Abdim's Stork breeding in Maseno

Abdim's Storks are annual visitors to Maseno, usually arriving between October and November and departing in June or July of the following year.

When I first saw them (in December 1988) a pair was busy building a nest on top of a eucalyptus tree within the Maseno School compound. The nest, a structure made of twigs and dry grass, was still incomplete by the time the birds were ready to leave in June 1989.

This rather strange phenomena was also observed in 1989, 1990 and 1991, and remains mysterious. They visited the same nest, added a few twigs to it, and... no more.

In 1992 the storks arrived towards the end of November and were seen flying in flocks of up to one hundred birds. Also in their midst were Black Kites. A few anxious days later, on the evening of 2 December 1992, I found a pair roosting very close to their previous nesting site.

This time, however, they picked a new nesting site — a shaded branch on a *Maeopsis emini* tree right next to the road that leads into the school compound. Nest building lasted about three weeks and towards the end of December they completed a large nest (about a foot in diameter) made from twigs and dry grass and 'decorated' with rags and polythene.

On the morning of 28 January 1993, one of the adult birds was observed lying in the nest — incubation had began.

Incubation continued in shifts of between 5 to 6 hours. The bird lying in the nest flew off as soon as the other one arrived and took its place.

Two chicks finally hatched on the morning of 23 February 1993 or thereabouts. My attention was drawn to the nest by a constant twittering especially when one of the adult birds flew in and was readying itself to regurgitate some

The chicks had long black and pointed bills with black faces and legs. The rest of the body was covered with creamy-white down feathers and their eyes appeared black and white. They were fed several times a day by the adult birds who also kept watch in turns. The adult birds also protected the chicks by shading them from the hot sun and completely covering them when it rained.

When they were about a month and a half old, the young birds developed heavy black spots on their neck feathers. Their wing feathers, especially the primary feathers, also turned black. During this time they were able to stand in the nest and occasionally appeared to be quite aggressive.

Their aggression heightened one afternoon when a curious Pied Crow perched very close to the nest in the absence of the adult birds. The immatures twittered and called in desperation. That evening they pecked at the adult birds and completely kept them at bay.

In April the immature birds were observed flapping their wings occasionally and spreading them in the morning to receive some warmth. The neck feathers were already all black, the belly and abdomen almost full white. The wings were black and almost fully feathered.

Towards the end of June, the wing flapping became almost frenzied and many times the birds hopped onto the branches close to the nest. Sometimes they were 'nudged' by the adult birds.

On 3 July 1993 one of the immatures flew out of the nest and landed on the roof of the school library about 100 metres away. About an hour later the other immature also flew out of the nest and landed on a tree nearby.

For the next four days the four birds fed on the school soccer field and pasture and roosted close to the nest at night. They have not been seen since 8 July — it is therefore assumed that they have moved on to some unknown destination and may come back next year. — *Jeam Agutu, P O Box 120, Maseno.*

[Postscript: The storks are back as of January 1994 and are sitting on one or more eggs — *Eds.*]

Lively competition for nesting material

While placing sisal twine strings across the trusses of my new veranda, various strands and cut ends fell on to the stone floor. A pair of cheeky Grey-headed Sparrows flew down and started picking up 3–4 strands of the fibre and flew off. On their return they were very indignant to find that an African Pied Wagtail and a Cape Wagtail were also collecting strands of the fibre. So this time the sparrows collected 6–8 strands a piece. When they returned for the third sortie, now, to their fury they found not only wagtails, but Black-headed Weavers and Streaky Seed-eaters also collecting strands. By this time I was cutting sisal string into pieces approximately two inches long, and spraying these all over the floor! A very noisy brawl ensued with most of the other species standing their ground — the sparrows, realising they were 'losing ground', then proceeded to cram their bills with as many strands as they could actually hold giving the ludicrous impression of a Grey-headed Sparrow with a huge, stark white 'walrus' moustache! And so this lively pageant continued for the duration of the morning. — *Kimbo (A. J.) Beakbane, BBK Ltd., P O Box 20, Kericho.*

Nests on Kisite Island

On 13 May 1993, I visited the Kisite Marine Park. It was one of those bright and dazzling days with the waves shattering into diamonds and the sky intensely blue. We arrived at high tide, not a good time for the snorkelling tourist hordes, so we had the place to ourselves. An unexpected bonus was the sight of tiny Kisite Island jam-packed with birds. This is one of the more barren and, to the human eye, more inhospitable of the many coral islands, but for the birds it is the place to be.

At the name-post end, about sixty Crab Plovers were facing into the wind along with about a hundred Gull-billed Terns. They took off as the boat drew near, wheeled around and settled again with a bit of jostling for position.

At the other end were a few stunted bushes bent sideways by the prevailing winds. In these, every possible nesting site was occupied. The best site, right in the centre of the biggest bush, was occupied by the only Grey Heron seen. As it laboriously climbed over other nesting birds to get to its nest it dislodged a sitting African Reef Heron enabling us to catch a glimpse of three downy young; as the Reef Heron settled again a tiny white head emerged from under the adult's tail — wrong end? There were Reef Herons present in plumages of varying shades of Ascot grey.

In the middle, a branch of a gnarled bush leaned out over the sea. Perched perilously on this was the nest of a Little Egret containing two young. The adult was walking agitatedly around just above and as we moved away 'treaded' its

way back to the nest. There were several Little Egrets on the island.

It was difficult to determine to whom the many other nests belonged but all those I could see were constructed from the same black twiggy-looking material (could it be dried seaweed?). The Park Warden said that he had not seen birds nesting on the other islands, possibly because they are infested with rats and are also subjected to disturbance from fishermen. — *Dorrie Brass, P O Box 30465, Nairobi.*

Marabous nesting at Hunter's Lodge, Kiboko, Kenya

Marabous successfully raised a number of young at Hunter's Lodge in Kiboko, about 160 km from Nairobi on the road to Mombasa, by September 1993. We observed the nesting Marabous when we stopped briefly on 19 and 23 September 1993.

There were some 20 to 40 nests in the tops of acacia trees in the lodge compound and parking lot. Each nest was a relatively small platform of dry twigs, in the highest part of the trees. In one tree, we observed at least four young, about two-thirds grown; they were large and had down on the body and feathers on the wings. The neck was downy and the beak about half the length of an adult's beak.

In another tree, several young were about to leave their nests. Their heads were downy and their beaks were shorter than an adult's. Their wing and body feathers were immaculate. Several other young had already fledged. We observed them flying, landing and drinking.

There was a lot of activity at the nests, with the adults beak-clapping and making various squawks and other vocalisations. The lodge staff said the Marabous had been nesting there for about five years. I also remember that Black-headed Herons nested in the compound in 1987. — *Fleur Ng'weno, P O Box 42271, Nairobi.*

[Marabous have been nesting at this site since at least 1979. It is good to hear that they have not yet departed! — *Eds.*]

Fish Eagle chicks feast on coots

A pair of African Fish Eagles nest in an *Acacia xanthophloea* (Yellow Fever Tree) in our garden. The nest has been in this tree for some 15 years now and is used almost every year. In the few years that it has not been used the eagles have nested at the top of a blue gum, also in our garden, and they repair and renew both nests each year before deciding which one to use. The *Acacia* nest is the most popular at the moment.

Over the last 8 to 10 years the parent birds, despite laying two eggs and often hatching both, have only reared one chick to maturity each time. Their diet is largely fish, most *Tilapia*, with the occasional small water bird for variety (I have even found the remains of a flamingo beneath the nest). We live on Marina Bay which frequently dries up completely, meaning that the parent birds have to hunt in their patch of the Crescent Island Bay. This does not include the shore line of Crescent Island as this is the territory of the Crescent Island Fish Eagles (which by the way have learned to hang around sport fishermen to see what they can steal or talk people into giving to them). Last year our bay contained shallow water and there were more Red-knobbed Coot on it than I have ever seen in years. Our Fish Eagles took full advantage of this as the coot are easy prey. Two eaglets were reared on an almost exclusive diet of coot and, presumably as a result of the easy food source, both young Fish Eagles reached maturity.

Two years ago part of the *Acacia* nest fell out of the tree (the eagles were not using it at the time) and in the collapsed remains I found a nest of Dormice, and a nest of Acacia Rats, along with myriad grubs and bugs. It was quite fascinating to see what else lives alongside the Fish Eagles. At nest repair and renewal time the remains of the old nest were removed and a new nest was started on the old site.

This year our bay is again dry and there were no easy coot so only one eaglet has reached maturity — it successfully attempted its maiden flight on 19 October 1993. — *Sarah Higgins, P O Box 358, Naivasha.*

Black-headed Weaver taken by Green Mamba

We continue with the themes of murder and mayhem ('African Spoonbill devoured by African Python' and other earlier notes). Our birdtable is close to a Bougainvillea hedge beyond which is a fine patch of coastal forest. The table attracts several species of birds, the most numerous being Black-headed Weavers. The birds have in turn attracted (at least) two Green Mambas during the past 18 months. The first, which measured 1.6 m, had taken up position in shrubs near the table from which it was flushed and despatched in November 1991.

On the afternoon of 4 April 1993 about 50 Black-headed Weavers were present, many feeding at the table but several perched nearby on the hedge. Among the latter group, a sudden green blur resolved itself into a large Green Mamba holding a female weaver in its jaws. The unfortunate victim fluttered weakly for about a minute before it was still. After a further 3–4 minutes, the Mamba retreated with prey into the dense foliage and we were unable to record ingestion.

Meanwhile the rest of the flock viewed the proceedings silently, presumably indulging in what is known as 'fascination behaviour'. Had we not known this term we might perhaps have described the scene as one of avian shock horror. — *Ken and Betty Bock, P O Box 641, Ukunda.*

Erratum: World Birdwatch list

Sharp-eyed birders may have noticed that two unwanted species crept on to the list of birds seen in Kenya during the World Birdwatch of 9-10 October: **Bittern** and **Cordon-bleu**. This was a typing error: neither of these species has been recorded (so far) from Kenya.

On the other hand, two species that *had* been seen were omitted from the list: **Alpine Swift** and **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark**. If our sums are correct, the final tally should thus be 797 species.

Oxpeckers: Where are they?

They did not fear human presence nor the long, strong wagging tails. They seemed to be welcome to some extent as they clambered over the cattle. Initially we thought they were devils who drank the blood of the cattle as they grazed in the vast grassland, *Musinaka*. Occasionally one of us left the temporary campfire where we used to roast green maize and potatoes to chase away the flocks of "devils". Once we caught one and observed it closely. It had a yellow bill with a red tip, a pale rump and upper tail coverts and a long stiff tail. Its legs were short with very sharp claws.

One day one of us discovered that after all the birds were only eating the ticks and parasitic flies, *tsisi*. This was contested by the others, only to be proved true after keen observation. From then on we never bothered these birds and strangely we started enjoying their beauty and their presence on the cattle. The hissing and the *kuss, kuss* call became our invitation to our responsive brown birds in Musinaka. In the evenings flocks of our friends could be seen on dead dry tree trunks around the marshes ready to roost. Occasionally their cosy nests, lined largely with animal fur, would be discovered in holes on big trees. We understood our friends needed comfort but we never worked out why their beaks had blood-red tips, and their eyes were similarly red.

This was in the early 1970s, close to Kakamega. Children of the 1980s do not know this bird. Where did they go? Don't tell me that the ticks and flies disappeared first because they are still there. Could the birds have been evicted and their homes grabbed? — *George Amutete, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Bathing birds

While many birds bathe, others seem not to — or do so rarely. It is observations of the latter that are needed. Commonly observed bathers among birds include thrushes, bulbuls, babblers and most if not all finches. White-eyes, sunbirds and even some hawks and eagles also bathe. The bathing facilities — the bird baths — are important for bathers. It is best to have at least two bird baths, one perhaps at a metre high and closely surrounded by bushes, the other lower (one-third metre above ground), with one side in the open, the other side near a bush. Very openly placed bird baths attract fewer species. Of course, many birds come only to drink, as most doves, and turacos. Low water baths encourage birds such as francolins to come in, and if they are not disturbed, they may occasionally bathe. Very large birds such as hawks and waterfowl do not come to bird baths, and require ponds or dams.

Rare bathers, as if afraid of water, include honeyguides that readily drink, but only hesitantly jump into the water and splash a bit. Small birds and those rarely bathing are assisted by having variously–sized stones, offering shallow-bathing possibilities. The best bird baths are relatively shallow. These require regular (say twice a week) cleaning (e.g. with a handful of small pebbles) to scrape off the algae that inevitably grow on the bath if not atop the water. Daily filling and overfilling, allowing dripping, are important — even in the rains many birds prefer the clean water of a bird bath to mud puddles. And if the effort is made to provide a constant flow or even simple drippage, more birds will use the bath regularly. To keep the birds coming it is vital, as with bird feeders, to maintain the baths when you are away!

As with feeders, there are many interesting and valuable observations that one may make of drinking and bathing birds. For example, monarch flycatchers such as the paradise-monarchs (or paradise flycatchers) splash-bathe, hitting the water several or more times in flight then shaking and preening. Dusky Flycatchers and other true flycatchers (Muscicapidae) in our experience bathe normally, though infrequently (insect-eaters much less often bathe, and fewer of them do so, than seed-eaters; fruit-eaters may or may not bathe and drink, some, such as turacos coming only to drink in dry periods, presumably when fruits tend to be dry). How often do individual birds bathe? At what temperatures do birds avoid bathing? A record-keeping, house-bound person could obtain interesting data by keeping notes and records of times and temperatures at which birds bathe (some thrushes and weavers bathe in the cold at 10°C or less).

There are many other bathing observations needed — about *how* each species bathes, and, for social babblers and mousebirds, does each bird get a chance to bathe fully ?

This note is offered that you might more fully enjoy, and understand 'your' birds — one studying them tends to become 'possessive', which is easily comprehensible — wildlife on any person's, or company's, or government's lands are free creatures, the knowledge about which renders a feeling of 'ownership'! — *L.L. Short and J.F.M. Horne, Box 24622, Karen.*

Visitors to a bird bath at Shimoni

We have a double bird bath made out of giant fossilised clam shells in front of our house at Shimoni. It is situated beside the patio and in front of the sitting room windows, bordered by big Desert Rose shrubs and with a Flamboyant tree stretching its branches over it. We have planted succulents and ginger plants around it and when they are flowering these attract sunbirds, particularly the Purple-banded and the Collared. Regular visitors are the Common Bulbuls, Black-breasted Starlings, Black-headed Weaver, Bronze Mannikins, Ring-necked Doves, Emerald-spotted Wood Doves, Pied Wagtails and Wolly-necked Storks. We also get, depending on the time of year, Yellow-fronted Canaries, Brown-breasted Barbets, Rufous-backed Mannikins, Yellow-bellied Greenbuls and Ashy Flycatchers (three young ones, still rather spotty, accompanied by three adults, presently come in to drink and bathe). The Spotted Flycatchers make good use of the trees around the bird bath and use the bath as well when they arrive. Amethyst Sunbirds and Olive Sunbirds quite often stop for a drink and now and again the Black-headed Oriole and Broad-billed Rollers arrive. We had a visit from a Richard's Pipit on 4 March 1993 and in the dry weather small flocks of Yellow-rumped Seed-eaters come in frequently. The Brown-hooded Kingfisher also uses the bath regularly during the dry weather. — *Maia Hemphill, P O Box 56, Shimoni.*

Migrants and local birds mob a Pearl-spotted Owlet

Reading Annemarie Löhding's note ('Lolgorien birds mobbing a snake...') reminded me of a similar incident I watched in the Serengeti a few years ago. On 23 March 1987, in trees close to the national park tourist centre, I spent 45 minutes watching 17 species (one less than Annemarie's tally, but all present at the same time!) mobbing a Pearl-spotted Owlet. The owlet, which has a reputation for taking birds, and which is often fairly active in daylight, is an obvious target for mobsters: it appeared to be grasping a small fledgling. The group was made up of 15 locals (four of which were also in Annemarie's Lolgorien party): Red-throated Tit, Common Bulbul, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Banded Parisoma, Red-faced Crombec, Grey Flycatcher, Chin-spot Batis, Brubru, Scarlet-chested and Mariqua Sunbirds, Grey-headed Social and Speckle-fronted

Weavers, Grey-headed and Rufous Sparrows, and Yellow-fronted Canary, plus two migrants, Olivaceous Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher.

Apart from the interesting variety, I was struck by the presence of the migrants. Birds might mob for a variety of reasons, to defend nests (like Drongos do with such zeal), or to draw attention to a potential predator (rather like Tommies sidling up to and watching cheetahs), but owlets are notorious small bird predators, and it seems a bit risky to join in the throng if you are only passing through. Perhaps the urge to mob is really overwhelming, or, with the mobbing taking place in April, perhaps breeding juices were flowing, and the desire to drive small bird-eating owls away was simply irresistible. I wonder if other *Kenya Birds* readers have seen similar mobbing parties, maybe someone else has seen more than 17 species at once! — *John H. Fanshawe, 14 Benson Street, Cambridge CB4 3QJ, United Kingdom.*

Uganda bird atlas homes in on sites

It is encouraging to see the number of new records coming to *Kenya Birds*; for example, in issue 2(1) on pages 18–20. By 1984, the last year for inclusion of records for the *Bird Atlas of Kenya*, only about a third of the possible distribution records had been obtained (see page 37 of the *Atlas*). In addition, many breeding records are likely to be added.

However, as work progressed towards a projected atlas of Uganda, it began to seem that QSDs are not the best way of making records, although they may continue to be the most convenient summary for publication in an atlas. Instead, Uganda has changed to recording *actual localities*, normally to the nearest 1 km, using standard 1:50,000 or 1:250,000 topographical maps (records to the nearest 10 km are accepted too; sometimes a 1 km accuracy is not practicable and in open, dry country, for example, it probably make little difference).

Although we will certainly not publish an atlas showing 1 km points, they can always be 'rounded up' for publication. However, once a record has gone into the 'system' it is very hard to go back and get details of exact locality. By using a higher lever of accuracy from the outset, we avoid the difficulties of analysing data from squares such as some of those around the high mountains where everything from bamboo forest to dry savanna occurs within a single QSD!

A further advantage of using exact localities is that future computer analyses using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) become possible. Such approaches are likely to become widespread; they are particularly useful for conservation planning. — *Derek Pomeroy, Makerere University, Institute of Environment & Natural Resources, National Biodiversity Data Bank, P O Box 10066, Kampala, Uganda.*

[The Ornithology Department's bird distribution mapping project is also using exact localities — defined as accurately as possible by latitude and longitude. Unfortunately 'standard topographical maps' are hard to obtain in Kenya! — *Eds.*]

Breast wetting in Spur-winged Plovers

It has been observed that Sandgrouse will fly long distances to 'fetch' water for their chicks by wetting their breast feathers. I found it interesting to record that the Spur-winged Plover also makes determined use of its breast feathers for carrying water, though for a slightly different reason. In April 1993 I was camped near Allia Bay, Lake Turkana. Not far from the lake shore I discovered a Spur-winged Plover on its nest, which was only a scrape between stones and goat droppings. The nest contained three eggs and male and female took turns to sit.

During the middle of the day between 10:00 and 15:00 h, when the scorching sun was right overhead, the sitting bird would suddenly get up, leave the eggs and run about 10 m to the water's edge. It would dip itself a few times, wetting its breast feathers only, then go straight back to the nest. The evaporating moisture on the feathers no doubt helped to keep the eggs the right temperature during the midday heat.

The birds were not at all disturbed by my presence, and I was able to photograph both nest and wetting action. — *Frants Hartmann, P O Box 30181, Nairobi.*

What's in a name? Some Birdwatch confusions

What's in a name?...quite a lot, if, like Dennie Angwin, you are attempting to check through and compile more than 70 lists from last October's birdwatch.

A few names in the 'green checklist' (which is based on Britton (ed.) *Birds of East Africa*, EANHS 1980) seem to cause particular confusion. Examine first the **White-eyes**, *Zosterops* species. It is not surprising that muddle abounds, since the taxonomy of this group has been highly changeable. Williams' field guide talks about five Kenyan species, two of which (the 'Green' and 'Yellow') had been lumped. Britton mentions only three — and what he calls the 'Yellow' is a *different* bird to Williams'. Whew...

To cut a long story short, we presently recognise three white-eye species in Kenya. The first, most familiar to most birders around Nairobi, is the **Montane White-eye** *Zosterops poliogastra*. This is the bird that Williams calls the Kikuyu White-eye *Z. kikuyuensis*. The Montane White-eye is a bird of highland forest or forest edge. The central Kenya race (*kikuyuensis*, found in the central highlands

east of the rift) is bright green above and fairly bright yellow below, with a broad white eye-ring and a broad yellow forehead. The race *taitensis* (Williams' 'Taita White-eye'), found on the Taita Hills and Kasigau, and the race *kulalensis* (Williams' 'Pale White-eye'), found on Mt Kulal, differ in having grey, not yellow, bellies. A fourth race, *mbuluensis*, has a yellow belly and occurs on Ol Donyo Orok and the Chyulu Hills.

Williams' 'Yellow White-eye' includes both of the next two species. The **Abyssinian White-eye** *Z. abyssinicus* is a mainly yellow white-eye with a narrow white eye ring. It is a bird of woodland and forest edge, often in semi-arid areas and on the lower slopes of the highlands. It occurs *east* of the rift but extends across to Narok.

The **Yellow White-eye** *Z. senegalensis* looks rather similar to the Montane White-eye but has a narrower white eye-ring. This is the white-eye of western Kenya, found in a range of forest and woodland habitats. It extends into the rift around Nakuru and Naivasha, and then across to Laikipia and the forest islands of the north (Mt Nyiru, Marsabit, the Ndoto Mts. and the Mathews' Range), but does not overlap with either of the other two species.

All clear? Then how about the **Placid Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus placidus*. In Williams this is treated as a race of Fischer's Greenbul *P. fischeri*, but Fischer's has since been split into two species: coastal birds, *P. fischeri* (genuine Fischer's, with pale eyes) and central/western birds *P. placidus* (Placid greenbul, with dark eyes). To add to the confusion, Britton (1980) gives *P. placidus* the ridiculous English name of Olive Mountain Greenbul (later changed in the checklist, thank goodness). Placid Greenbuls are found in most central and western forests; the central Kenya race *(placidus)* has greyer underparts and a whiter throat than the western Kenya one *(sucosus)* described elsewhere in this isue. Readers should have advance warning that both these races have now been 'lumped' with another species, *P. cabanisi*, so the whole lot will soon be called Cabanis's Greenbul... as if greenbuls weren't difficult enough already!

Another confusion, but this time one of simple mis-identification, comes with the **Black** and **Southern** (or South African) **Black Flycatchers** (*Melaenornis edolioides* and *M. pammelaina* respectively). These two all-black species are very similar, but the Southern Black has a bluish gloss to the mantle which is lacking in the dull-mantled and slightly smaller Black. Their ranges also differ. The Southern Black is a bird of woodland and bushland in central and eastern Kenya, almost entirely to the east of the rift. The Black Flycatcher is found in moist habitats west of the rift, extending to arid areas south and west of Lake Turkana and curling round to the Kenya-Ethiopia border.

The **Brown-backed** and **White-browed Scrub Robins** provide another source of rich confusion. The **White-browed** *Cercotrichas leucophrys* of the 'green checklist' includes two well-marked forms, one with white wings and one with a red back, that Williams (and others) treat as full species. The White-winged Scrub Robin is in the drier north and east, while the Red-backed is in the moister highlands and the coastal strip. Both are common where they occur.

The **Brown-backed Scrub Robin** *C. hartlaubi*, on the other hand, is a scarce inhabitant of thick undergrowth in scrub and forest edge in the central and western highlands. It can be told from the previous species by its dark brown back and the broad black band on the lower part of the white-tipped tail (about a third of the tail's total length).

The **Curly-crested Helmet Shrike** is also a puzzler. In fact, this is the same bird as what is now called simply the **Helmet Shrike** *Prionops plumata*. This species has curly- and straight-crested forms. In Kenya the curly-crests occur in the north-west, down to Baringo, and the straight-crests in the rest of the country.

Similarly, the **Rufous-backed Mannikin** is now treated as a race *(nigriceps)* of the **Black and White Mannikin** *Lonchura bicolor*. Confusing, one has to admit, since the rufous-backed form is anything but black and white. Properly black-and-white birds are found in the western highlands, while those with rufous backs occur east of the rift.

Finally, the **Greater Swamp Warbler** *Acrocephalus rufescens*, which clearly illustrates that birders tend to see what they expect to see. Williams' statement that this bird is abundant at Lake Naivasha has caused no end of confusion — and mistaken records. The Naivasha birds are in fact Lesser Swamp Warblers *A. gracilirostris*. Both species do occur in dense papyrus, but the Greater is confined in Kenya to the swamps in and around Lake Victoria and its basin (this does not, for anyone whose geography is rusty, include Naivasha!).

By the time the next Birdwatch rolls round, we expect to have a new and updated list of East African birds, including English names, and some of the changes are going to be quite hard to get used to. Watch this space... — *Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Identification first aid... Kakamega Greenbuls

Leon Bennun
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

When it comes to identification, most birdwatchers would probably agree that while cisticolas are bad, greenbuls are even worse. Not only are there numerous species that all seem to look the same, plumaged in dull greys, browns and greens, but the wretched birds spend most of their time creeping around dense foliage in dim light.

In Kakamega there are twelve species of Pycnonotids (thirteen if one includes the ubiquitous Common Bulbul, but I don't intend to). Most of them are hard enough to identify even in the hand, not that most birdwatchers ever have such an opportunity. And the problems of poor light and secretive habits are real enough: how do you tell whether the back is olive-brown or olive-green when the bird is flitting away at high speed and you can barely see its silhouette? Nonetheless, most Kakamega greenbuls *can* be identified if you know what to look for in terms of habitat, behaviour and call as well as plumage. In the following article I draw heavily on an earlier paper by Don Turner and Dale Zimmerman (*Scopus* 3: 33–47, 1979) and on *Birds of Africa*, Vol. 4, as well as my own observations.

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul — *Martin Woodcock*

Let's start with something simple:

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul
Andropadus latirostris

The only greenbul with yellow 'whiskers', i.e. malar streaks on either side of the throat. It usually looks very dark in the field, but the yellow whiskers stand out clearly

— except in immatures, which lack them and can easily be mistaken for the smaller and shorter-tailed Little Greenbul. The Yellow-whiskered is common but often rather shy; it is most easily seen in fruiting trees, but can be found in dense undergrowth and creepers as well. It is less confined to a particular level in the forest than most greenbuls, occurring both close to the ground and in the canopy. Its distinctive song is a loud erratic drawn-out chattering, not at all pleasing to the ear but easily recognised and one of the commonest sounds of the forest: "chip-chirup-chip-chirp-chirup-chip-chirup...".

Ansorge's Greenbul ***Andropadus ansorgei***
Little Grey Greenbul ***A. gracilis***

These two species are extremely similar. At least it is easy to tell that you have seen one or the other: both are *very small* and short-tailed, rather bright in colour for greenbuls, with a greyish head and throat and a distinct narrow white eye-ring; the bill is greyish. The Little Grey looks much more yellow and green than Ansorge's; it has a yellow belly and yellowish-olive flanks. Ansorge's by contrast looks more brown and grey; it has a bright gingery wash on its flanks, which is its best field character when seen well. Ansorge's (which has an endemic Kakamega race) is supposed to be more common than the Little Grey in Kakamega; this may be so, but I suspect the two species are often confused.

Both are fairly tame and easy to observe, usually seen alone, in pairs or in small family parties, and prefer the mid-level of trees where they forage along the smaller branches. Their songs appear to be quite similar — confusingly so. Ansorge's has a sweet, pure whistled song, uttered in a leisurely, unhurried way: "twee-tu-tuui" ("I'm - so - pret-ty"), the last note being slurred. I have not clearly identified the Little Grey's song at Kakamega; it is apparently similar but longer and more complex with more notes in each phrase.

Plain (or Cameroon Sombre) Greenbul ***Andropadus curvirostris***

Looks a bit like a giant version of the last two species combined: a dull olive greenbul with a yellowish-olive belly and gingery flanks. In the field the greyish head and well-defined greyish throat contrast *slightly* with the olive upperparts. An incomplete greyish-white eye-ring (i.e. the upper and lower eyelids) is also visible (contra *Birds of Africa*!). When seen well it has a long, slender black bill and a reddish-brown eye. The Plain Greenbul spends most of its time below about 10 m, foraging in tangled shrubs and vines that extend into the lowest trees; it usually keeps to leaf tangles rather than moving about on the open branches. The song is a distinctive if rather subdued three or four-note phrase, "dwee-duwi-doo", ("You can't see me"), uttered from the undergrowth; the pitch

is low, the notes slurred but mellow, and *Birds of Africa* notes appropriately that the song has "a lazy, casual quality, as if it were almost too much of an effort to sing".

Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens*
The best field character of this greenbul is that it has none: it is totally uniform dull olive green all over. In the field it looks small (though larger than Ansorge's and Little Grey) but chunky, with a short stubby bill. The eyes are dull grey-brown and the legs yellowish-brown. It is usually hard to see, keeping to dense thickets, and prefers secondary growth rather than the interior of dense forest. It is best identified by its song, a loud cheerful 'bustling' noise; several low grating sounds are followed by a medley of squeaky bubbling notes, rising to a loud finale; often a series of musical whistles is thrown in somewhere in between. Also distinctive is its hen-like scolding call, a loud "kok-kok-kok-kori, kok-kok-kok-kori...". It sings freely at any time of day and is common on the pump-house track (see Kakamega article, this issue).

Slender-billed Greenbul *A. gracilirostris*
Easy to identify (relatively speaking!): a slender, long-tailed, long-billed greenbul that usually keeps to the high canopy and appears 'two-tone': the olive upperparts contrast with the uniform plain grey underparts. No other Kakamega greenbul has plain grey underparts, so identification is possible even if this is all that is seen. The song varies; usually a loud "duddjuweer...dudjuweer...", rather like an oriole with a sore throat (the same rhythm, but much less musical); also a slow series of single high-pitched, slightly slurred whistles. It often feeds among the topmost clusters of leaves in medium-level to tall trees.

Shelley's Greenbul *A. masukuensis*
A rather distinctive greenbul: slim and long-tailed, Shelley's is bright green above with duller olive underparts and a *contrasting* grey head and neck; a narrow white eye-ring is clearly visible. It looks very much like the central Kenyan race of the Mountain Greenbul (which does not occur in Kakamega) but is slimmer, smaller-headed and much less yellow below. It is a remarkably silent bird (I have never heard it call). Shelley's has a distinctive foraging behaviour: it clings to tree-trunks like a woodpecker, working its way up and searching for insects in crevices; often it hops up some metres from the base of a tree, then flies down to the base of the next and starts climbing again.

Toro (or Toro Olive) Greenbul *Phyllastrephus hypochloris* (formerly *P. baumanni*)
This is the only Kakamega greenbul where I have to say: pass! It is *very* hard to identify in the field, being uncommon, inconspicuous and nondescript. It closely resembles the Plain (or Cameroon Sombre) Greenbul and is probably nearly impossible to separate from it under field conditions, although it is smaller with a long straight, grey (not curved, black) bill and no grey-white eye ring. If you are lucky enough to have the bird in the hand then it is easy, as the Toro has clear yellow and grey streaks on the underparts, and also has a *Phyllastrephus*-type bill without notches (*Andropadus* bills are notched). This species sticks to the undergrowth in dense forest and appears to be rare in Kakamega; we catch it infrequently in mist-nets. I do not know its voice but *Birds of Africa* declares that it is 'distinctive'; the song is "a loud, harsh, tuneless phrase 'titiwah', short and clipped, third note lower... rapidly repeated 2–4 times", the call "a harsh, shrill chatter which often precedes song: 'chrrrrrrrrrrrrrtitiwah'"

Cabanis' (Placid) Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cabanisi* (formerly *P. placidus*)
An undergrowth and low-level species that is found in small lively parties. It can be identified by its pale yellow throat and bright yellow belly, contrasting against an olive breast, and its rufous tail. The yellow throat is sometimes puffed out, making it more conspicuous. Quite a noisy species, although the normal call is just a low grating 'churr', often made by several birds in chorus; the song is a duet or chorus, the churr followed by a rhythmic "chiru, choru, chiru, choru, choru, chiru...".

Honeyguide Greenbul *Baeopogon indicator*
This medium-sized greenbul looks like a honeyguide, with a conspicuous flash of white in the outer tail feathers. However, it is easily seen to be a greenbul by its chunky shape, with a large thickset head, and its direct, not undulating, flight. The male has a white eye (the eye of the female ranges from grey to brown) which is distinctive if seen well. Another good feature is the underside of the tail, which is all creamy-white. It is mainly a canopy species, sticking to the treetops, and can be hard to pick out; it is often in small groups. It has a whistling song, a series of loud, high-pitched notes with the last down-slurred; a sharp, ringing, 'wolf-whistle' call, "tsew-tseeoowoo, tsew-tseeoowoo"; and a cat-like mewing call, "mee-u-aow, mee-u-aow" — all uttered from the treetops.

Red-tailed Bristlebill (or Bristlebill) *Bleda syndactyla*
A very big bright greenbul, but shy and hard to see, keeping to dense undergrowth. Easily identified by its large size, deep rufous tail (often the only

part that is glimpsed!), bright yellow underparts and bare blue skin around the reddish eye. Its song is one of the characteristic sounds of Kakamega, a series of rather plaintive, rapid trilled whistles, descending the scale, preceded by a chattering note: "trrituri, trrroo-trrroo-trrroo-trrroooo".

Joyful Greenbul *Chlorochichla laetissima*

...and we finish on another easy one. This bird lives up to its name both in call and appearance. It is a big, bright greenbul yellow-green above and golden-green below; always seen in groups, usually in the canopy of smaller trees, both in dense forest and at the edge. Its presence is announced by a lively, bubbling chorus of happy greenbully notes. With luck you will be singing similarly, having identified it!

Children's section

WOODPECKER

On the tree trunks
It climbs up
And around
And shouts its loud call to the sky.

It is well built
For its way of life
Shock-absorbing skull
Stiff supporting tail.

Strong beak to probe into the wood
Long pointed tongue
To spear its insect prey
Two toes forward, two toes back.

People say
The woodpecker's cali
Warns the traveller
Of a fruitless journey.

by Fleur Ng'weno

WORD SEARCH

by Kuria Ndung'u

It's so easy to play! Just study the grid below and see if you can find 16 hidden bird names. Draw a circle around each one you find. (We have circled "DOWITCHER" to get you started.) The names may be down, across or diagonal; forward or backward.

Good luck!

T O R R A P K S T A R Y
P D C A P A L I S N O K
F A O G D L O T R B R O
O G A W U W N A K A S P
M O U G I C B B L N S U
A L R F F T P I K O I A
R U T I U L C N T W B L
T C O N T E A H Y L I A
I N I C A T O R E Z C V
N R C H A T O N K R E D
P E K L O L S A O B D K
L I A R E O D W D K C U

Erratum: *Kenya Birds* cover

The illustration by Simon Thomsett on the cover of *Kenya Birds* 2(1) was of a Peregrine, not a Lanner Falcon as indicated. Apologies for the mix-up.

Threatened Birds of Kenya

4. Turner's Eremomela

John Fanshawe, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

The warbler, Turner's Eremomela *Eremomela turneri*, is a forest species, which occurs in small groups high in the canopies of large trees in Kakamega Forest. It is treated as rare in the African Bird Red Data Book, a category for species at risk because of their restricted populations. Turner's Eremomela is only known from western Kenya, south-western Uganda (Nyondo Forest only) and close to the Uganda border in extreme eastern Zaire. There are old records from the Yala River (which flows through Kakamega) in Kenya which is where Dr V. G. L. van Someren collected the first specimen in 1915. The species has been seen in South Nandi Forest too, but almost all recent sightings are from Kakamega. In the almost eighty years since the species was discovered, it has remained poorly known. The nest, for example, has not been found, but individuals have been collected with enlarged gonads at Kakamega suggesting breeding does occur in the forest. Something to look out for! Nor is Turner's Eremomela the only Red Data Bird in Kakamega: Chapin's Flycatcher *Muscicapa lendu* occurs and is also categorised as rare.

Turner's Eremomela is a small rotund bird with a rather short tail (the eremomelas' closest relatives are the almost tail-less crombecs). it bobs out high in the trees, revealing its smart chestnut cap and a marked black chest band. It looks similar to another species, Brown-crowned Eremomela *E. badiceps*, and was thought to be a subspecies of that bird until Prigogine found them occurring alongside one another at Kailo in Zaire. Turner's appears to forage below Brown-crowned when they occur together.

Observations suggest this species may be more common in forest edge habitats, but this still needs to be conclusively shown, for it is easy to overlook in the tall canopy of primary forest stands. Like other eremomelas, Turner's usually occurs in flocks of 3–6 birds, sometimes more (as many as 15 have been recorded in Zaire). It is believed to be insectivorous, taking caterpillars and other prey from the surface of leaves. Like many other forest birds, Turner's Eremomela regularly joins and forages in mixed species flocks, particularly with the Buff-throated Apalis *Apalis rufogularis*.

The nine eremomelas are a wholly African genus, their name derived from two Greek words, *eremia* meaning a desert and *melos*, a song, suggesting sweet songsters which prefer drier habitats, which at least six species do. Five occur in Kenya, but only one, the Yellow-bellied *E. icteropygialis*, is really regularly seen.

Yellow-vented *E. flavicrissalis* is widespread at low densities in desert and semi-arid areas of the north and east, and the other two, like Turner's, have small ranges; Green-capped is represented by three races, each confined to a different area, and one, *E. t. occipitalis*, is only known from a few records in Sokoke Forest and Mangea Hill; Green-backed is confined to the extreme west of the country in sites like the Kerio Valley where small flocks trail through the dry bush, calling loudly. Maps in the Kenya bird atlas suggest the species may be in decline. Indeed, it would be interesting to discover why so many of the eremomelas occur over restricted ranges, and, apparently, at such low densities.

Elsewhere in this issue of Kenya Birds you will find details of where to go bird-watching in Kakamega. Seek out Turner's Eremomela when you are there, look out for any breeding activity if you are lucky enough to spot one, and don't forget to send the record in to *Kenya Birds* !

Comment: Great Crested Grebes

G. R. Cunningham-van Someren, P O Box 24947, Karen

The article on Great Crested Grebes in *Kenya Birds* 2(1) drew attention to the plight of these birds but was, I felt, at times rather misleading. I concur that the local population appears to have declined but I am not satisfied with the oft-repeated claim that this is almost entirely due to gill-net fishing. Also, I doubt there is any evidence that the Kenya population is down to fewer than fifty birds.

So many factors must be taken into account. Naivasha is the only place where gillnets are used. There may possibly be a decline in certain wetlands through changes in general hydrology and water levels, multiplication of pest plant species (*Salvinia* and *Eichhornia*), loss of water lilies, eutrophication and reduction of food potential.

Grebes are wanderers, suddenly turning up on some wetland and as suddenly disappearing. Have such movements, and the reasons for them, been examined? The Great Crested Grebe is *not* fish-dependent and birds will certainly visit wetlands where there are no fish. They were recorded at Lake Nakuru before my cousin, Dr V. D. van Someren, Mr Murphy and I introduced the small tilapine fish *Oreochromis alcalicus grahami* from Magadi, and there has been breeding on fishless wetlands (for example the well-documented 1977/78 breeding on the Indachant Swamp). In 1988 there were many Great Crested and Little Grebes (and hundreds of coots) on the fairly new oxygenation ponds at Nanyuki and, more surprising, some Little Grebes with many coots on a flooded quarry at Wajir of all places!

There are hundreds of small wetlands scattered all over Kenya, the vast majority of which are not being monitored or even examined in detail regularly. Some have fish, others not; some have vegetation possibly suited for grebes, others do not. It is hard to know what a 'suitable breeding site' is. All the breeding sites that I have visited differ substantially from each other. At Indachant the birds bred amongst emergent semi-aquatic grass with nests of submerged aquatic weeds, while at Naivasha dozens of nests, constructed of *Ceratophyllum* and *Najas* were simply in the open on waterlily pads. Many of these were taken over as resting or even breeding nests by the Grey-headed Gull in 1961.

The following is an incomplete list of some sites that should be searched for Great Crested Grebes:

(1) South Kinangop - Kipipiri: Sasamua and Semimi's Dam and several smaller sites. (2) Eldoret area, Lessos, and two large dams on the Tanning Extract Lands; a large dam at Moi's Bridge. (3) Kitale area: Many large swamps and several large dams at Endebess. (4) Kiambu - Ruiru - Thika area: Sukari Ranch dam at Ruiru, plus many dams on the coffee and sisal estates and at Del Monte estates. (5) Mwea – Tebere: Masinga Dam and others downstream. (6) Isiolo - Nanyuki, west across Laikipia to Rumuruti, north to Lorochi: dams on most of the large cattle ranches. (7) Nakuru District: Lake Solai (but this regularly dries up and is only suitable in years of good rains). (8) Seasonal swamps in the Rift west of Kikuyu.

Events and Announcements

Morning **Bird Walks** led by Fleur Ng'weno and Damaris Rotich are held every Wednesday. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS and Kenya Museum Society members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

East Africa Natural History Society. All birders in East Africa should join this Society, which offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus. Sub-committees of the Society include the OS-c and BirdLife Kenya. The EANHS also organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 742131/61, ext. 278, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday morning (except Wednesday) and Wednesday afternoon.

Scopus, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published three times a year by the OS-c and can be obtained from the OS-c Hon. Treasurer and Secretary Don Turner, P.O. Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133). The annual subscription is KSh 400 (KSh 450 up-country); overseas rates available from Don Turner. Records are welcomed from the East African Bird Report which forms the third issue of *Scopus* each year.

BirdLife Kenya offers for sale notelets (showing attractive pen and ink drawings by Dale Zimmerman), postcards (showing the endemic birds of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in a painting by Norman Arlott + the endangered Sokoke Scops Owl) and T-shirts (with a Crowned Eagle motif by Simon Thomsett). These are available from the Department of Ornithology and the EANHS office. The proceeds go to bird conservation projects.

A meeting of the parties of the **Bonn Convention** on migratory animals will take place in Nairobi from 6–13 June 1994, and will be preceded by a one-day scientific seminar. A main item of discussion will be the Africa-Eurasia Waterfowl Agreement.

The **21st International Ornithological Congress** will be held at the Hofburg, Vienna, from 20–25 August 1994. The **21st BirdLife International World Conference** will precede it from 12–18 August in Rosenheim, Germany.

Contacts For BirdLife Kenya, Kenya Wetlands Working Group and the EANHS Nest Record Scheme, as well as queries concerning *Kenya Birds*, write to Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131–4 / 742161–4 extension 243.

Thanks to the Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Programme (KIFCON) for their support of this issue

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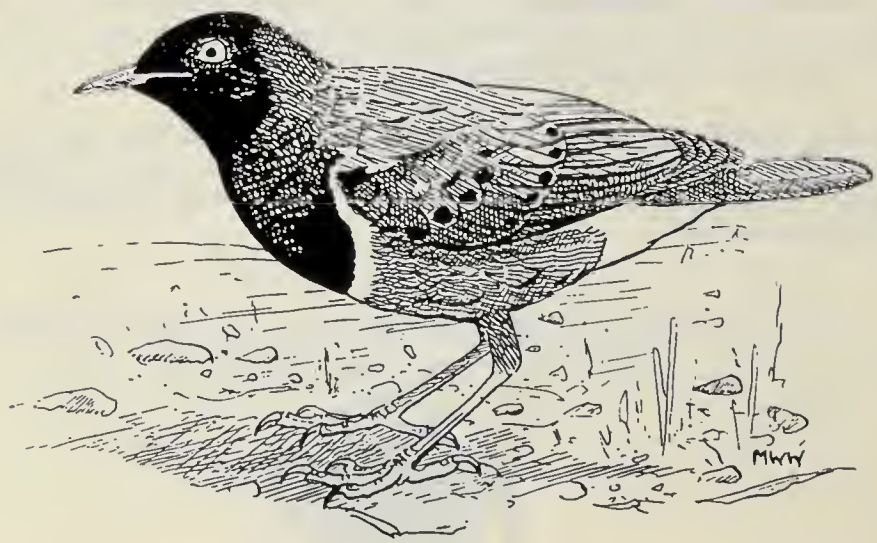

Superb Starling — *Martin Woodcock*